

2dartist

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Issue 110 | February 2015

110

130
pages of
inspiration and
techniques

Design Vehicle Concepts

Matt Tkocz shares his process for designing
and rendering a futuristic dune buggy

+plus

Paint fantasy
characters

Improve your color and
composition with a look behind
the process of Emily Chen's image

Mastering
colored pencils

Marco Mazzoni shares
his stunning flora and
fauna renders

10 of the best
digital images

Eytan Zana and Cristina Lavina
feature in this issue's gallery
selection of our top 10 images



Editor's Letter



JESS SERJENT-TIPPING
Deputy Editor

Welcome to 2dartist issue 110!


If fantasy environments and cool characters are your thing, you're in the right place! We interview Paul Sullivan, art director of colorful animation *The Book of Life*, and traditional artist Marco Mazzoni, who's mastered the colored pencils – just wait until you set eyes on his stunning renders! Maxx Marshall shares his comic book sketches, while Meg Owenson demonstrates how to overcome a blank canvas.

We've got useful tutorials for designing and rendering concept vehicles, creating cool female characters, and a beginner's guide to set extensions – not to mention a gallery bursting with inspirational images. Enjoy!

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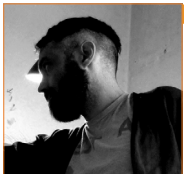
PAUL SULLIVAN

Paul Sullivan started as a concept artist in 2003. Over the past ten years he's worked in film and console game design, mostly as a visual development artist and concept artist.



JESSICA ROSSIER

Jessica works for films, videogames, or advertising companies by providing visual assets as a concept artist and matte painter. In 2013 she launched WARDENLIGHT studio with Bastien Grivet.



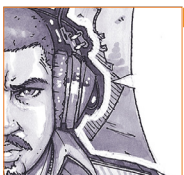
MARCO MAZZONI

Marco Mazzoni was born in 1982 in Tortona, Italy, and is currently based in Milan. Marco only uses colored pencils to create his artwork of female portraits, flora and fauna.



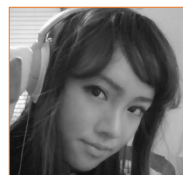
MEG OWENSON

Meg Owenson is a freelance concept artist and illustrator based in the UK. She is currently working in the game and film industry. She guides you through the creation of a fantasy environment in Photoshop.



MAXX MARSHALL

Maxx Marshall is a 2D/3D artist making videogame art at Fun Bits Interactive. Maxx also freelances for comics, trading cards, marketing adverts, illustration and other random stuff.



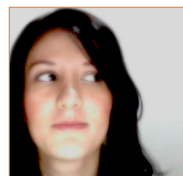
EMILY CHEN

Emily Chen is a freelance Illustrator and concept artist in the entertainment industry. Currently, she is studying Character Animation at the Rhode Island School of Design in America.



MATT TKOCZ

Born and raised in Poland and Germany, Matt moved to California to study Entertainment Design at Art Center College of Design in 2008. He went on to work in the film, game and theme park industry.



SANDRA POSADA

Sandra Posada is from Medellin, Colombia and for three years she has been a freelance concept artist and illustrator specializing in character design. Sandra has worked on projects for graphic novels and comics.

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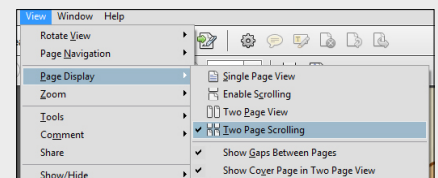
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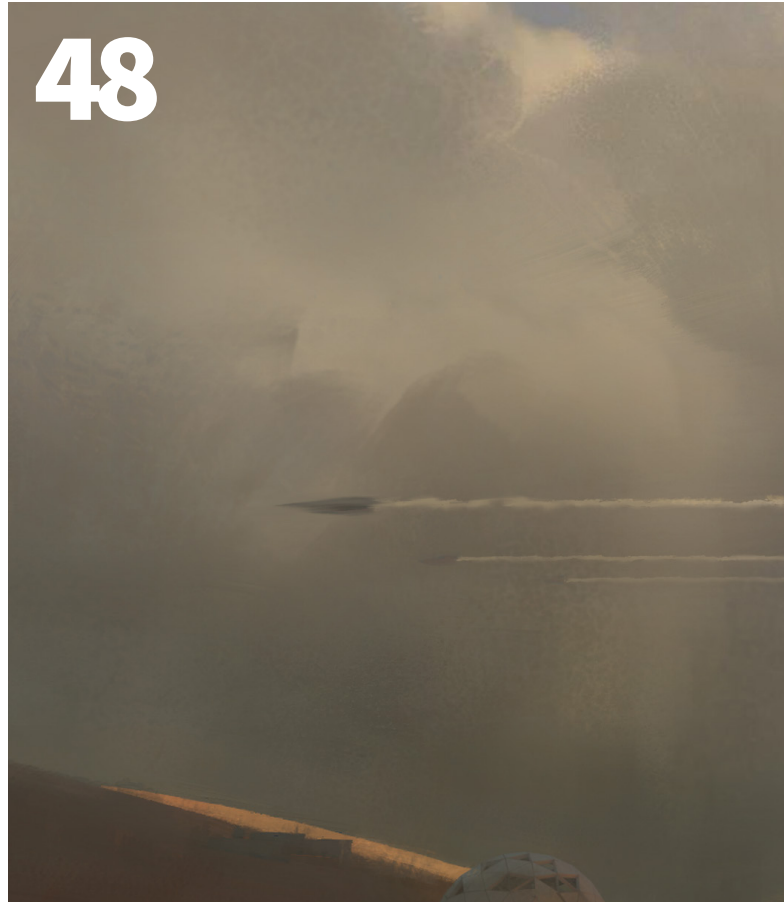
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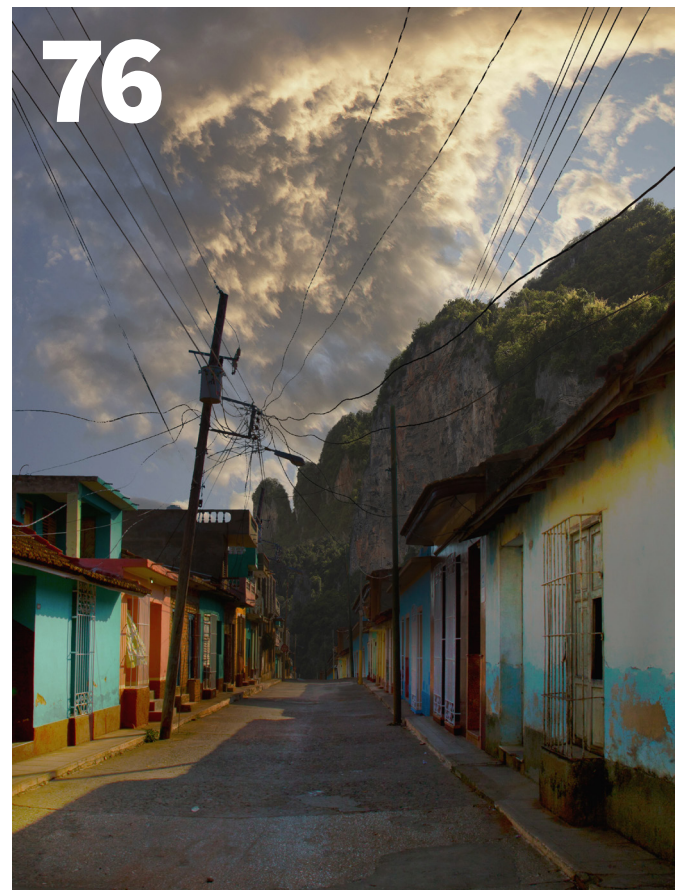
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Paul Sullivan

Bringing the dead to life

Concept artist Paul Sullivan shares a selection of his inspirational environment and character concepts and speaks about his experiences as art director for *The Book of Life* ▶



The Artist



Paul Sullivan

pencilprimate.com

Interviewed by:
Jess Serjent-Tipping

Paul Sullivan started in the entertainment industry as a concept artist in 2003 and since then has had a wide range of experiences working at different companies and within a variety of design style aesthetics. Over the past ten years he's jumped back and forth between film and videogame design, mostly as a visual development artist and concept artist. Paul is currently working on development with director Jorge Gutierrez, and freelancing for various clients in the children's book industry.

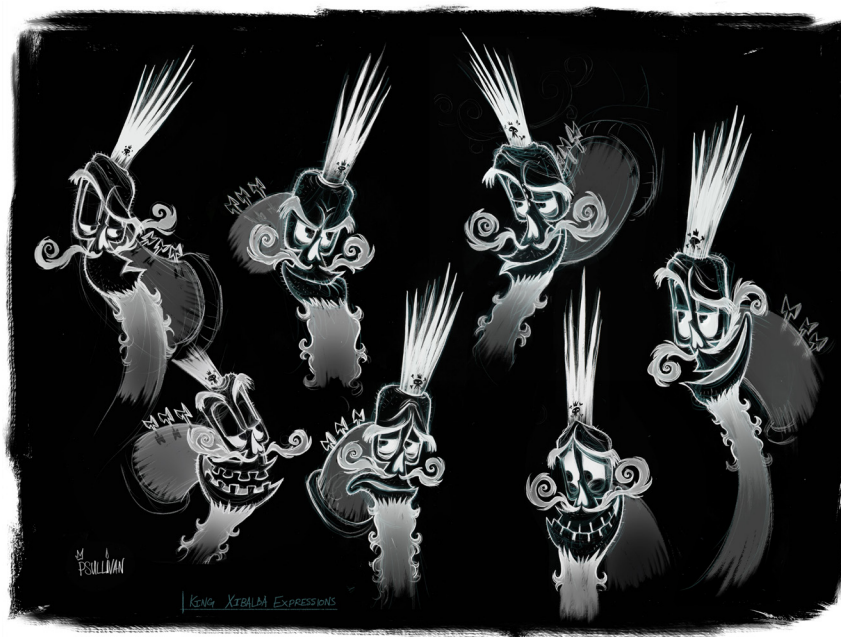
Paul Sullivan kickstarted his career in the entertainment industry as a concept artist in 2003, gaining experience in a variety of design styles, and over the past ten years has worked between film and game design. Paul took on the role of art director for the animated film *The Book of Life* in 2009, and is the man behind the great visualizations that brought the characters to life. We take a look at a selection of the inspirational illustrations as Paul gives us an insight into the experiences behind the *The Book of Life*...

2dartist: Hi Paul, thank you for chatting with 2dartist! Can you firstly tell our readers a bit about yourself and your journey into the industry?

Paul Sullivan: Hi! Thank you for the opportunity to be featured in your publication! My journey into the entertainment industry has been paved with bumpy roads and highs and lows. I have always had the attitude that anything worth doing is usually not easy and my career path has been no exception. It all boils down to passion and determination. I have always been a hard worker and kind of a perfectionist. I put this pressure on myself and always have.

So I believe my career path actually started a long time ago, with my mother (who is also an artist) always encouraging me to follow my heart and love of drawing. She enrolled me in art classes at a very young age and always encouraged and supported my love for art by providing me with the necessary tools and encouragement I needed to continue falling in love with drawing and painting.

● Xibalba final character design painting, *The Book of Life* – digital paint, Jorge Gutierrez – character design, Paul Sullivan



I have had struggles with a lack of passion or confidence over the years and have many others to thank for restoring that at different stages in my life. Usually they didn't even know that they helped me, they were also just finding their way and following what they loved. In high school I met Jordan Kotzebue and his amazing family of incredible artists. They were an example of people who came into my life at just the right time. They reignited my love for art and design and inspired me to keep going.

2da: How did you develop the style you are recognizable for today?

PS: I think style is just a collection of things you like mixed with things you inherently do. There are certain artists or types of art that I favor, and I have my own way of interpreting and more specifically my own way of making marks. If you practice over and over, you eventually start to develop certain aesthetic tendencies whether you're conscious of them or ▶

● Visual Development of Afro perfect slice concept – traditional pencil and ink, Paul Sullivan



● Character design sheet of a moat monster – traditional hand-drawn and digital paint, Paul Sullivan



● Concept art sketches and final digital paint – traditional sketches and digital paint, Paul Sullivan





not. I think this is how you land on a personal style; influence mixed with personal taste and practice.

My influences are all over the place. Growing up, I loved comics and the art is usually what sold me on which book to buy. So early on I was influenced by comic artists. Later in art school I studied more about different historical art periods. I loved the renaissance artists and the baroque artists. These two things led me to the intensive study of anatomy and figurative art. I used this study as a foundation for learning about other styles and dissecting what makes them unique. After embarking on my career I was influenced by my industry and co-workers. I had more exposure to great designers and craftsmen and this also influenced me a great deal.

2da: Which artist's do you admire and how did they influence your work? And what keeps you motivated to work?

PS: Like I previously stated, in part, my influences helped shape my style. They have a wide range from

different times in my life. Some of my favorite comic artists are Mike Mignola, Travis Charest, Frank Miller, Chris Claremont, Art Adams, Frank Cho, Mark Schultz, to name a few. I have always been intrigued by the works of Leonardo and Michelangelo, Carravaggio, Klimt, and Schiele. Also, illustrators such as Norman Rockwell, Howard Pyle, Harvey Dunn, NC Wyeth, and Dr. Seuss.

Current industry people that I love are Jorge Gutierrez, Tim Lamb, Alexandre Puvilland, Paul Felix, Paul Lasaine, Nico Marlet, and Nate Fowkes, among many others.

My motivation for art has always been there, I love it. I live a life dedicated to study and growth, it is what motivates me. I am motivated by learning and growing. There is always something to work on with my own skill set. And there is always someone else out there that is better at something than me, so I draw inspiration from those people and work on myself. But a big theme in my artistic growth has always been variety. Whether it's being inspired

by a different artist or even switching to a different medium or analyzing a new style. It keeps things fresh and the journey new. ►

⚡ PRO TIP

Adapt your process

Two things that are constant in filmmaking and creating art for entertainment 1) making changes and 2) delivering on schedule. Work on different processes that will allow you to deliver your work on schedule that gets to the heart of the matter whether you have 5 days or 5 minutes. Always focusing on the big picture is important, and if your process allows for your supervisor to ask for changes along the way without messing you up, it will be easier on both of you.



● Lighting key for *The Book of Life*. Mary Beth explaining the Book of Life to Sasha in the first sequence – digital paint, Paul Sullivan



● Lighting key of the Sanchez family standing together with Manolo after he wins the bullfight for his life – digital paint, Paul Sullivan



● One of seven early development paintings that established the look of *The Book of Life* – digital paint, Paul Sullivan – layout, Simon Varela

PSULLIVAN

⚡ PRO TIPS

Always focus on the big picture

When designing, force yourself to block in your shapes and foundation elements before jumping into the details. This keeps your composition and design strong for your image to look harmonious, and has the specific elements fit together better. It will be easier on both of you.

Stay loose!

I always remind myself to stay loose while drawing and painting. If your drawing or painting is laboriously done, it's laborious to look at. If you put your own energy and confidence into your work, people will respond with the same energy. If you have no energy or confidence, it is usually apparent in the final product and falls flat.



● Early development style frame for *The Book of Life*. One of seven original pieces that helped sell the look of the film – digital paint, Paul Sullivan

🕒 Artist Timeline Paul's career so far

2003: BFA in Illustration – emphasis in animation. Studied under Larry Kresak at RMCAD in Denver, CO

2002: Lead designer with Alexandre Philippe for *Chick Flick: The Miracle Mike Story*

2003: First concept artist job with Activision – *Iron Man* and *X-Men*. Moved to San Francisco CA.

2006: Concept artist at Crystal Dynamics – *Tomb Raider Anniversary*, *Tomb Raider Underworld*

2007: Concept artist at Namco Bandai Games – *Afro Samurai*

2008: Visual development artist at DreamWorks Animation – *Megamind*

2009: Art lead at Sony – *Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time*

2009-2014: Reel FX art director/ production designer on *The Book of Life*

2013: Co-wrote *The Art of The Book of Life*

2014: *The Book of Life* hits theaters



2da: What is your creative process like? Could you choose one of your favorite past images (that you've created) and explain a little about its creation, and why it's your favorite?

PS: My creative process has been to start focusing on shapes and design, then reference images to help make those designs more solid and believable. I try

to always step back during the process and force myself to think about the bigger picture, analyzing why I am making the decisions I am and what should be my priorities.

I feel this keeps the design and foundation strong before getting into the details. Details are fun but if the idea isn't there, details are worthless.

So for example, for the *Land of the Remembered* painting, I started with a series of small thumbnails showing the shapes I strongly wanted to be a theme in the design of the land. In this case, circles and spheres, skulls and hearts. So I designed the base of the composition with those shapes in mind, and then I referenced a lot of different elements that I wanted to include in the piece. ►



I justified my design with a story; in this case drawing upon the history of modern day Mexican culture and folk art.


The Mayan culture was conquered by the Spanish and they built religious structures in place of Mayan places of worship. So I used Mayan temples as the

bases mostly, and added Spanish colonial elements on top of these structures, inspired by that history. I included the heart and skull iconography in the windows and doorways, wrought iron and sugar skulls or Calaveras. Once I got the design in a place I was happy with, I did the same with the painting, starting with broad strokes and color ideas based on

Mexican folk art, lots of complimentary colors and contrast. Once I had a strong base, I worked on the details later.

2da: Do you have any favorite software, tools and techniques that you use to create your artwork? Any that you would recommend to our readers? ►





● This image was used as a Color Key and environment design for La Muerte's castle in *The Book of Life*. In the end, we also ended up using it for matte painting purposes as well, and projected most of what you see onto simple models in the final shot of the film

● I intentionally incorporated hearts, skulls and flower shapes into this design, which was our main iconography of the film

● It also needed to look and feel like La Muerte and utilize all the design language we had already established for her and the *Land of the Remembered*

PS: I use both traditional and digital mediums. As much as I primarily use Photoshop and ArtRage, I still love drawing as much as possible with pencil and paper, brush pen and charcoal.

A charcoal technique that I love is to cover the whole paper with a light wash of charcoal and pull out shapes with an eraser. Then I go back and, using a pencil, I draw back into the shapes. This gives me a strong foundation of value separation before I begin adding detail.

2da: You have spent the past five years working on the incredibly detailed animated film, *The Book of Life*. Can tell us a bit about that journey and what you experienced along the way?

PS: My journey working on *The Book of Life* began when my friend Simon Varela called me up and

told me he had a fun project he just started on with director Jorge Gutierrez; Simon was doing some drawing for a pitch and they needed someone who could paint and do first look imagery for the pitch.

After making the introduction, I started working with the director and did a series of paintings (around eight or nine) and this is what we used to pitch the film to executive producer Guillermo Del Toro. He would later become our partner in the production, 21st Century Fox.

At the time the team consisted of just the five of us, Jorge and Sandra (Jorge's wife) Brad (producer) and Simon and myself. Simon and I were at the helm of art department and creating the look of the film. We hired our art team together and led them to create all of the assets in the film, supervising and creating along the way.

A big part of my job was to create the color script and find the broad strokes that would later be the foundation for our lighting and color, and telling the story with color and mood. Half way through production I ended up assuming both leadership roles on the art side, production design and art direction. I took the look of the film the rest of the way throughout our final lighting and color correcting, then later, helped to promote and discuss our journey at various press events and interviews.

2da: What was a typical day like in the studio? How did the process go for generating ideas for *The Book of Life*?

PS: A typical day for me would start at 8:30-9am and end anywhere from 8pm-12am. During the first 6-8 hours it was so packed with meetings, presentations, giving feedback, doing draw and paint overs, and

● I started this piece by traditionally sketching the castle design which needed to represent the heart of the *Land of the Remembered* and be reminiscent of the Mexican Tree of Life

● This started as a small traditional sketch of just the castle, which I then blew up and fleshed out. Then I brought it into Photoshop where I digitally painted it along with the rest of the environment, but made sure the focal point stayed on the castle as this was going to be the first reveal of La Muerte's palace

● I also took influences from Gustav Klimpt's *Tree of Life* and Antoni Gaudi's *La Sagrada Familia*, which you can see in what I like to call the 'organized chaos' of La Muerte's world

running from one room to another, I sometimes didn't get the chance to even use the bathroom.

The last hour of the day I used to catch up on notes and feedback and doing my art for the show once most people have gone home for the day. I lead by example, and wouldn't expect anyone to do something that I can't show myself. It really helps me get a better idea of how to have answers to specific questions by at least doing one myself. I would set the bar and use that as something to point to and have discussions about for the rest of the team. They would take it from there and make it better!

2da: How do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?

PS: I love film, it's a great way to relax and escape from the stress of life. I watch a lot of movies and

television series. I also love to support my industry, and all of the people who work so hard to entertain the world. I also exercise to reduce stress and stay healthy mentally and physically; jogging, rock climbing and practicing martial arts.

Another thing I love to do is sketch! But for myself which means I can draw and paint whatever I want and not have to adhere to anything specific like I do with work.

2da: If you could give emerging and aspiring artist's one piece of advice on working in the industry, what would it be?

PS: 1. Work hard on yourself always. 2. Don't ever feel entitled to anything, if you aren't getting the type of work that you want to do, refer to step 1 and you will eventually get there. Be easy to work with; try

to re-frame your personal attachment to your work when you get feedback from anyone to look at it as a gift they are giving you to help you make your art better. Have a good positive attitude always and people will want to work with you. Sometimes that's the thing that puts you over the edge or becomes a deal breaker.

2da: Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

PS: I am hoping to develop my own content while continuing to work on high profile films and possibly games. I am currently developing my own IP and production designing and character designing in animation. I would hope to eventually work on live action films in some capacity just because I love the medium. But we shall see what the future holds. I can only work on myself and keep trying to succeed. ●

● Xibalba final character design painting, *The Book of Life* – digital paint, Jorge Gutierrez – character design, Paul Sullivan

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- Blaz Porenta, illustrator

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The Artist



Marco Mazzoni

marcomazzoni.tumblr.com

Materials Used:

Traditional tools

Marco Mazzoni was born in 1982 in Tortona, Italy, and is currently based in Milan.

T R A D I T I O N A L S P O T L I G H T

Mastering colored pencils

Discover the inspiration and techniques behind artist, Marco Mazzoni's stunning colored pencil rendering of female faces masked by flowers and small creatures ▶

Artist Marco Mazzoni is based in Milan, Italy where he works from his studio creating amazingly detailed color pencil drawings. A major part of his work is defined by his beautifully rendered female faces; framed by birds, butterflies and flowers. His masterful renders are fueled by an interest in Italian fairy tales, mythology and the extraordinary women of history.

It's amazing what Marco can achieve simply with colored pencils!

2dartist: Hello! Thanks for talking to 2dartist. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Marco Mazzoni: I started to draw when I was a child with the paper in my father's office. When I was 20, I moved to Milan and after 4 years at the Brera Academy, I focused myself to learn to draw with pencils.

After a trip in Sardinia where I met with my aunt, I began to understand the importance of human

"I try to create a circle where the three subjects are on the same plane/level, like a still life"

history. So I started studying all the stories about extraordinary women who through their expertise on plants, took care of entire countries. Then the world decided that they were witches and this has deleted the real matriarchal culture.

2da: What does your process involve when working with colored pencils? And what is it about the medium that has made you work exclusively with it?

MM: I have always worked with colored pencils and paper. My problem is that I have never been able to use 'liquid' colors, like oil or tempera. During the years at Brera professors hated me for this. This led me to concentrate on the pencils.

I realized that they were considered poor, but when used with the painting techniques they can give extraordinary results.

I started to study the chiaroscuro technique of Caravaggio's paintings and tried to apply it to my pencil work. All my work is based on the Veil technique – beginning with the black-and-white (and brown) and then getting to the color glazes.

2da: Can you tell us a bit about your chosen subject matter and where you draw your inspiration from?

MM: I'm working on two different cycles: one with moleskine paper, where I try to revive some moments of real life or characters that happen to strike me, through the use of animals as subject; the other where I try to depict the so-called mystical: the woman and her harmony with plants and animals.

The animals in the images are always those that carry pollen (butterflies and hummingbirds), because I try to create a circle where the three subjects are on the same plane/level, like a still life, in an attempt to create a perfect harmonious scheme where you take from nature without any kind of violence. ►



● **TITLE:** *Aquarium II*
MEDIUM: Colored pencils and ink
on moleskine paper
DIMENSIONS: 21 x 26 cm

● TITLE: *Here Comes The Pain*
MEDIUM: Colored pencils on paper
DIMENSIONS: 30 x 21 cm





● TITLE: *Dysphonia*
MEDIUM: Colored pencils on paper
DIMENSIONS: 30 x 45 cm





● **TITLE:** *Atropine*
MEDIUM: Colored pencils on paper
DIMENSIONS: 30 x 30 cm

“My future plan is to try to create a picture book with a fairy tale written by a friend of mine. It will be interesting to try to draw something new with a story behind it...”

2da: How do you like to spend your time when you aren't creating beautiful art?

MM: When I don't draw I spend a lot of time with my dog, running in Milan, trying to cook drinking too much beer or wine, reading a lot of books,

watching too many TV series (I'm a TV series maniac, I need to know what are the newest and I must see them) and listening to too much music.

My work has allowed me to interact with some of the heroes from my teenage years, such as Jessicka Addams of Jack Off Jill and Scarling. Near my studio there is a fantastic music bar where I go every Saturday night with my girlfriend Marta and my friend Diego.

2da: Finally, what are your big aspirations and inspirations? And what can we expect to see from you in the future?

MM: My biggest aspiration would be to be able to live off my work as much as possible, and get to know as many interesting people as possible... if one day, for instance, I got to meet Kat Bjelland (the singer of Babes in Toyland) in person, I could die happy.

My future plan is to try to create a picture book with a fairy tale written by a friend of mine. It will be interesting to try to draw something new with a story behind it... ●

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to 2dartist!



● TITLE: *The Junkies*
 MEDIUM: Colored pencils and
 ink on moleskine paper
 DIMENSIONS: 30 x 30 cm



● TITLE: *Danse Macabre*
 MEDIUM: Colored pencils and
 ink on moleskine paper
 DIMENSIONS: 14 x 18 cm



● TITLE: *Martyr*
MEDIUM: Colored pencils on paper
DIMENSIONS: 50 x 40 cm



● TITLE: *Malalingua*
MEDIUM: Colored pencils on paper
DIMENSIONS: 60 x 40 cm



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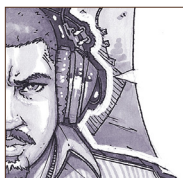
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MAXX MARSHALL

Sketchbook

In this month's sketchbook, Maxx Marshall shares his inspirations and techniques, and we take a look into his eclectic medley of pencil, ink and marker creations

The Artist



Maxx Marshall

maxxmarshall.tumblr.com

Maxx Marshall is a 2D/3D artist making videogame art at Fun Bits Interactive. Maxx also freelances for comics, trading cards, marketing adverts, illustration and other random stuff.

Take a look inside Maxx Marshall's sketchbook of characters and creatures...

I am a 2D/3D artist and animator originally from Detroit, but my art has lovingly taken me to many of the places I've dreamed of going. I've worked in Japan, England, California and am currently in Seattle. I've done art and concept for games like *Little Big Planet 3*, *God of War PSP*, *Daxter*, *World of Warcraft*, *Okami*, and many others.

I draw constantly. I draw on the bus, at the bus stop, at family functions, bars, pubs, coffeehouses, and so on. My sketchbook is filled with things that I've liked over the years. The thoughts and ideas are inspired by random people, places and things I've seen in my travels.

Inspiration and ideas

I am inspired by the people and places I see. Be it a concepting job in Akihabara or a calming vacation in Edinburgh with my family, I am always on the lookout for new and interesting ideas. I'm a self-taught artist who grew up on comics, role-playing games and videogames; these helped me focus in on the type of artwork I wanted to make. I like to sit back with markers, pen and pencil and just sketch out random ideas.

Materials

I usually sketch on thick, almost Bristol paper and I prefer very bright paper. I have 15 or so clear plastic clipboards that I place my paper in as well as a piece of Bristol card to stop markers from bleeding through. Other than holding my paper straight and tidy, the clipboard seconds as a lightbox for when I want to iterate on an idea.

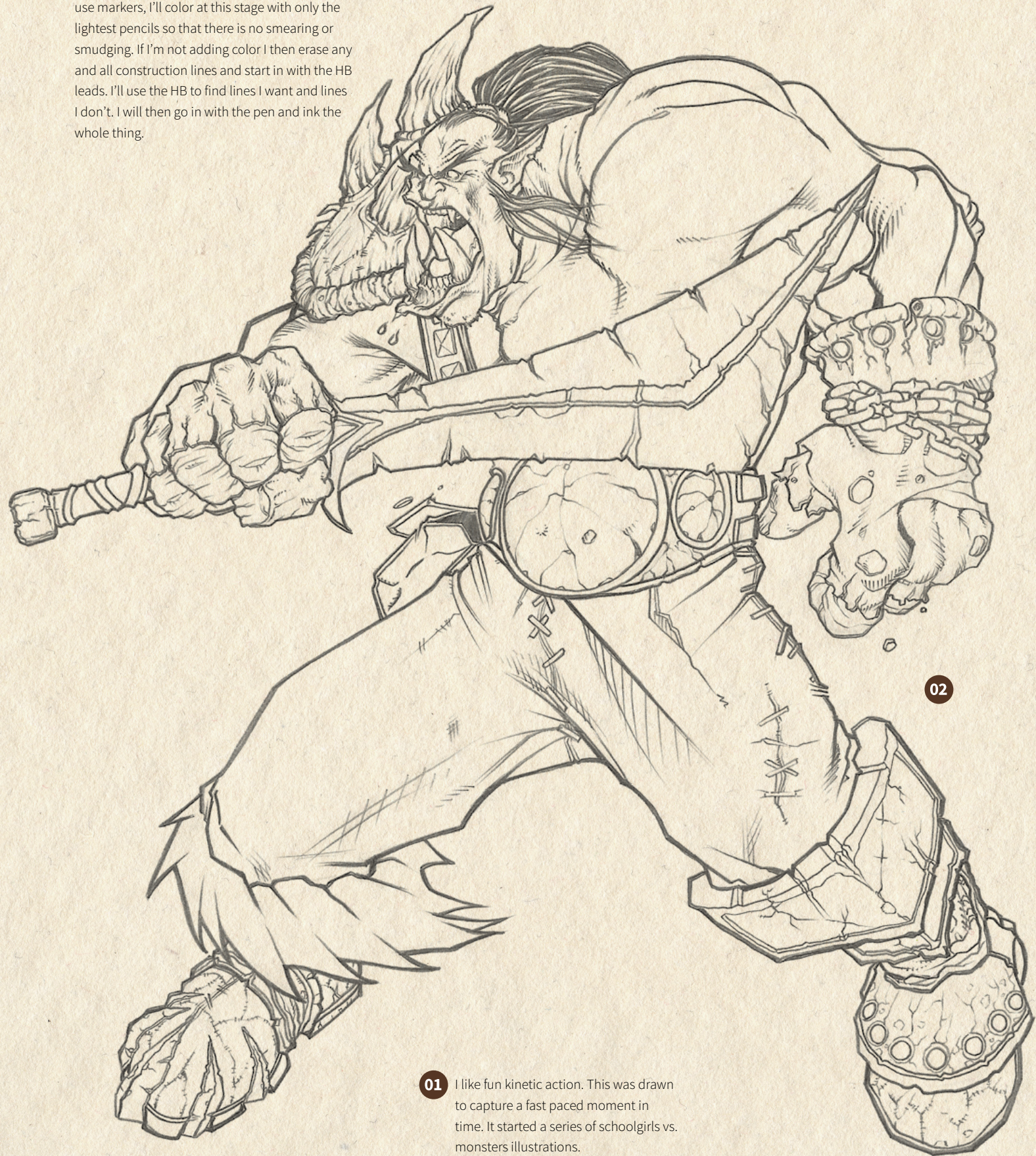
I have lead holders with 3H and HB leads for pencil work. I use a mixture of Prismacolor and Copic markers to add color to my ideas. When inking, I always use Sakura Micron pens because I like how they feel on the page. I like markers because they are fast and an amazing production artist tool, but I've been getting into watercolor more and more.

Sketching techniques

When starting an idea, I usually see an iconic shape in my head that is based on the person on the bus or character. That shape is quickly and lightly drawn with the 4H. If I've decided to

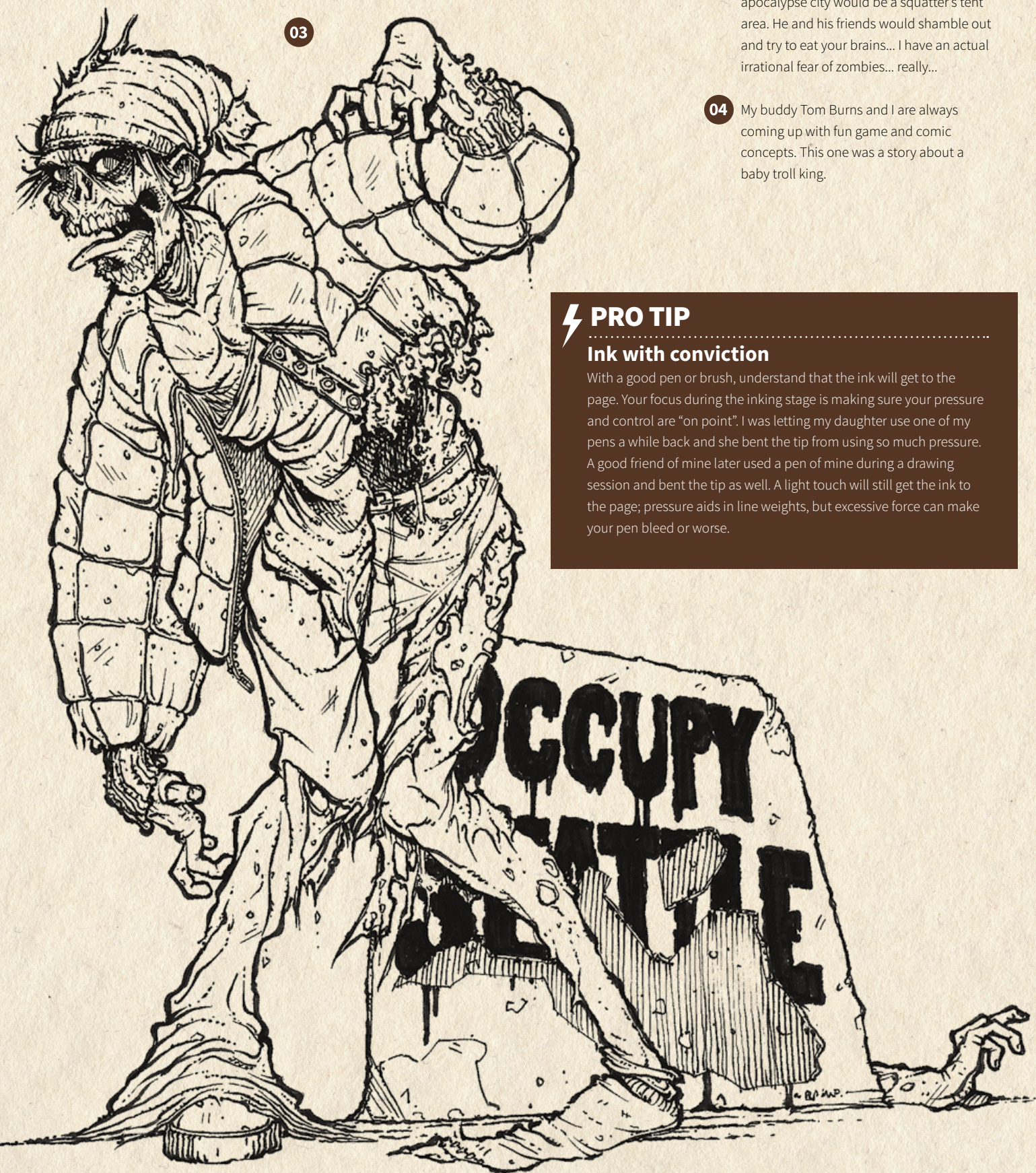


use markers, I'll color at this stage with only the lightest pencils so that there is no smearing or smudging. If I'm not adding color I then erase any and all construction lines and start in with the HB leads. I'll use the HB to find lines I want and lines I don't. I will then go in with the pen and ink the whole thing.



01 I like fun kinetic action. This was drawn to capture a fast paced moment in time. It started a series of schoolgirls vs. monsters illustrations.

02 I like the thought of the orcs wearing mismatched armor pieces, as it adds to their chaotic nature.



03

03 I was thinking that a great game environment section in a zombie-apocalypse city would be a squatter's tent area. He and his friends would shamle out and try to eat your brains... I have an actual irrational fear of zombies... really...

04 My buddy Tom Burns and I are always coming up with fun game and comic concepts. This one was a story about a baby troll king.

⚡ PRO TIP

Ink with conviction

With a good pen or brush, understand that the ink will get to the page. Your focus during the inking stage is making sure your pressure and control are "on point". I was letting my daughter use one of my pens a while back and she bent the tip from using so much pressure. A good friend of mine later used a pen of mine during a drawing session and bent the tip as well. A light touch will still get the ink to the page; pressure aids in line weights, but excessive force can make your pen bleed or worse.

04





05



05 While taking the bus to work in Sheffield, I would draw the people around me as zombies and creatures. One afternoon, I was greeted by a bus full of kids who pushed through one by one to look and comment on these guys.

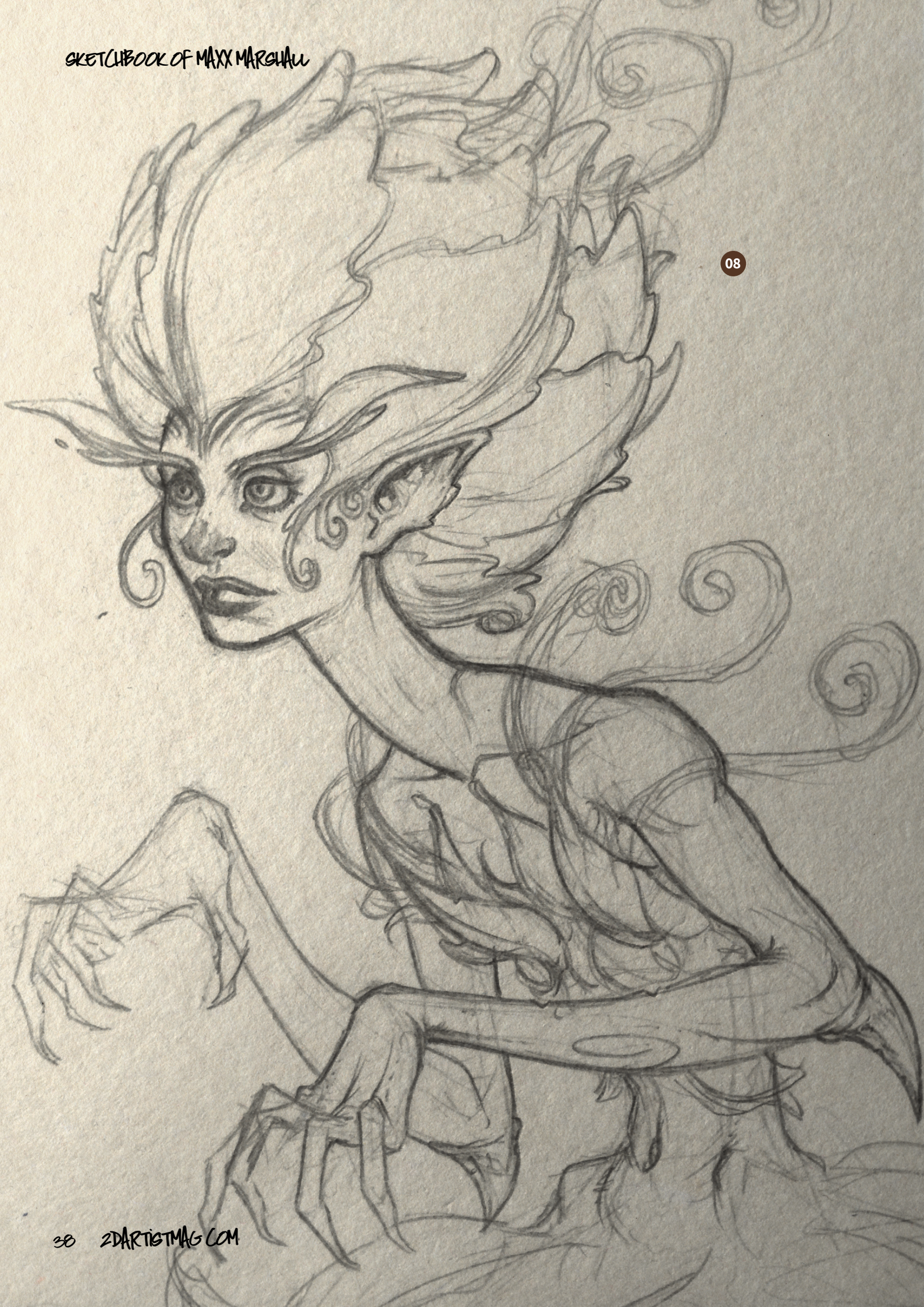
06 After some concept on *God of War* PSP, I started learning about Native American mythology. This guy's legs were the basis for the four seasons. In my head the player finds him dead and the feet protect his dead body in a boss battle.

07 I grew up on the Terry Jones and Brian Froud Pressed Fairy Books. I never turn down a chance to sketch tiny fairy folk. I like the offset of this one's arms. It gives him character and describes his species a bit more by stating, "They're a wonky looking lot."

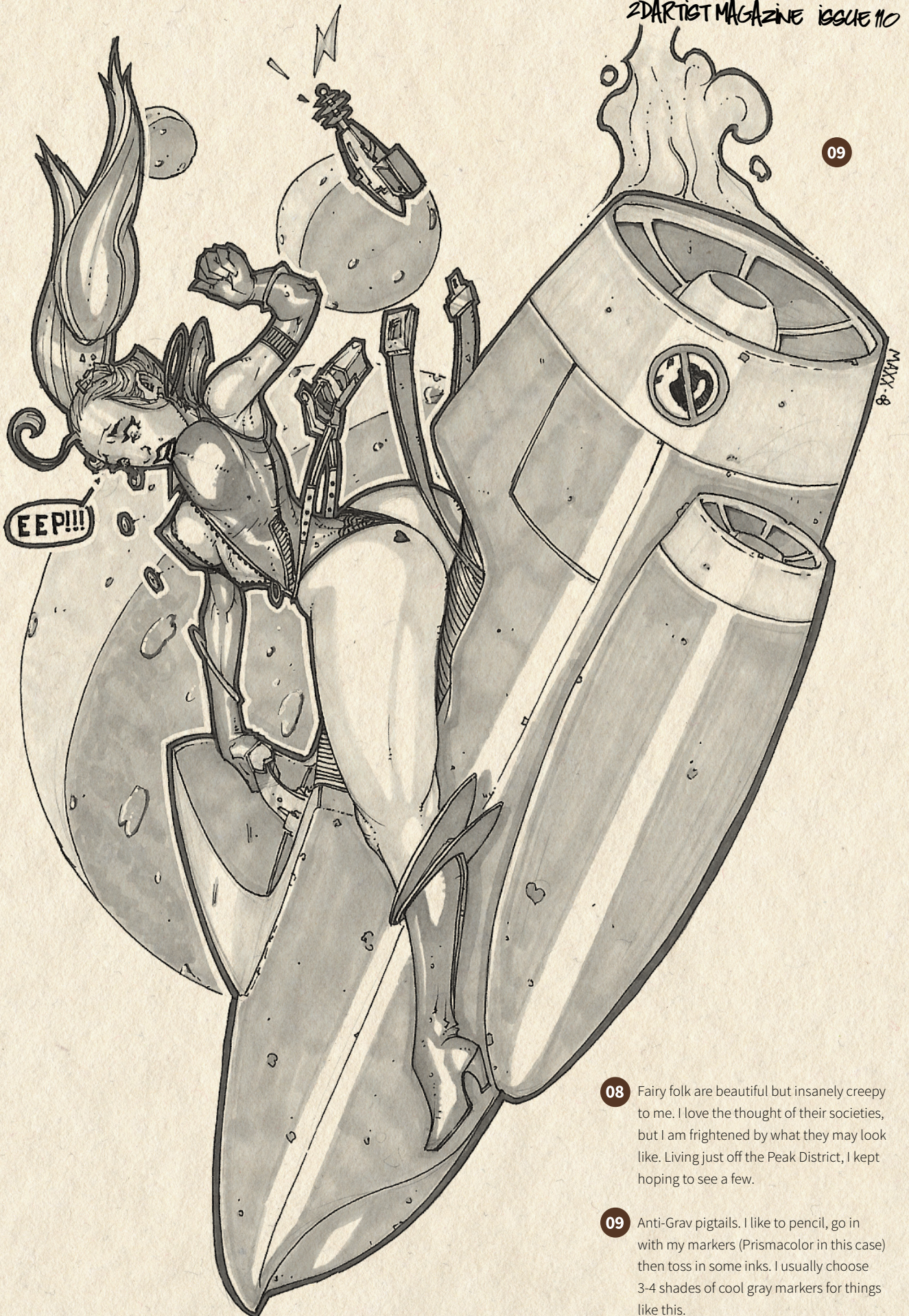


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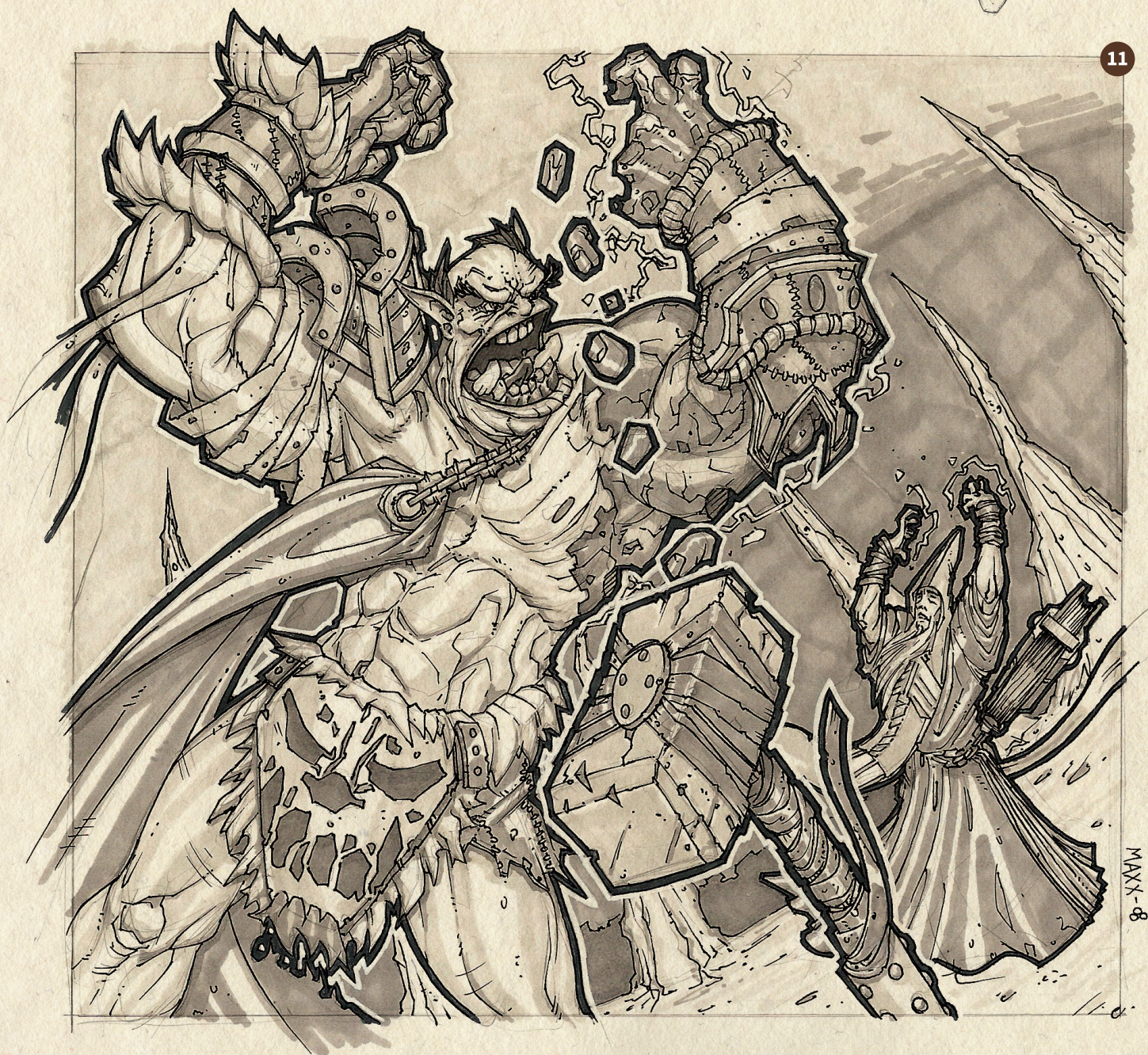
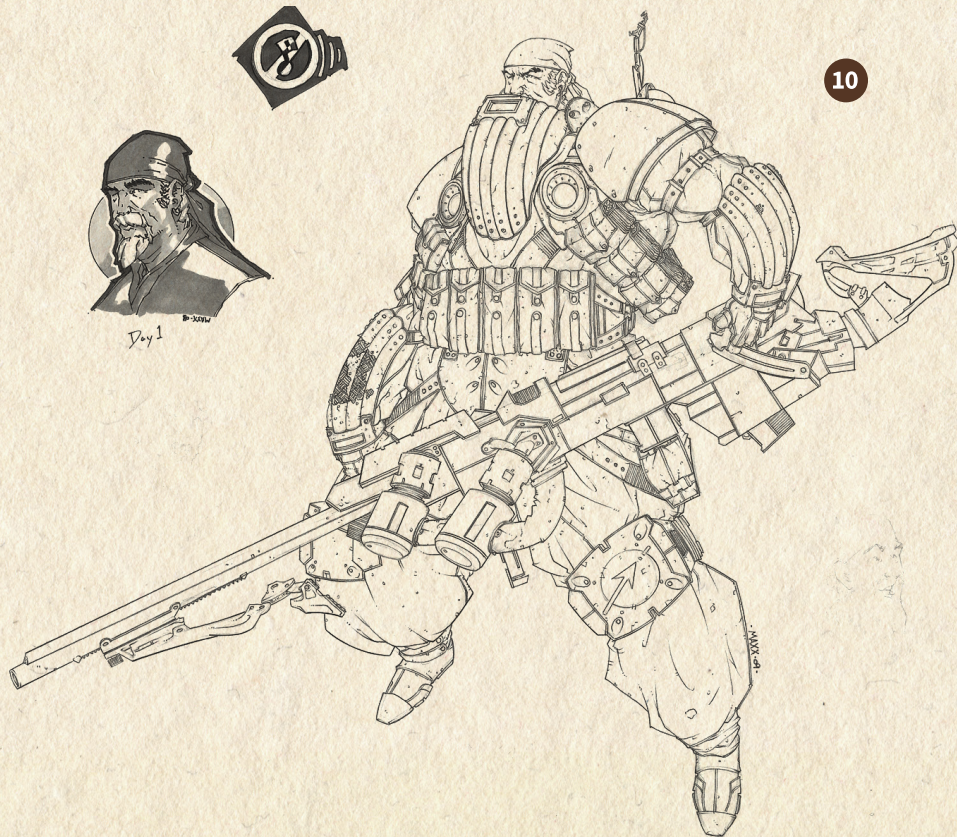
08 Fairy folk are beautiful but insanely creepy to me. I love the thought of their societies, but I am frightened by what they may look like. Living just off the Peak District, I kept hoping to see a few.

09 Anti-Grav pigtails. I like to pencil, go in with my markers (Prismacolor in this case) then toss in some inks. I usually choose 3-4 shades of cool gray markers for things like this.

10 This guy was based on a biker in Irvine California. He was sitting by us and his outfit was so retro, that I just kept adding and adding until he was what he is. As a game character, I assume he's a sniper.

11 As an old-school pen-and-paper RPG player, I always imagine wizards with these giant tomes that housed their greatest spells. I wanted this wizard to use his as a shield. He's battling big scary things with his book companion.

12 When penciling something like this, I will toss on my favorite music, and get lost in the details. Every line, circle and crease sketched translates to something as I set out to color these guys.



⚡ PRO TIPS

Teach and learn

While playing a game of *Street Fighter*, an amazingly talented fighter told me that he feels part of his job is to bring more people into the fighting game community. I tend to see the artistic community the same way. I also feel that teaching and learning from each other is extremely beneficial to the community as a whole. I was recently discussing nail polish with a make-up artist who gave me a few great ideas based on how she applies the coats of polish and the overall effect.

All art is valid

I've worked with many amazing artists in the past – people who have made me want to pack up my pens and shuffle off to flip burgers. As time has passed, I understand that my personal loves and happy-button-pushing imagery isn't for everyone. I can talk for days with zombie enthusiasts, but when at home with my daughters respect the artists on their favorite cartoons. Our community is a creative one; we won't all like the same things. When it comes to art and design, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" still rings true. As creators we need to remember that intolerance towards certain genres of artistic expression doesn't help our community. Embrace your fellow artists... or I will send the Zerg after you!





13

13 Years ago my sister left her markers in my care. Until five-six years ago I did all my game concepts in grayscale. Since opening her old markers and adding color to everything, I feel I have grown as an artist and production artist.

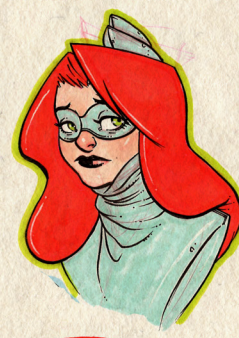
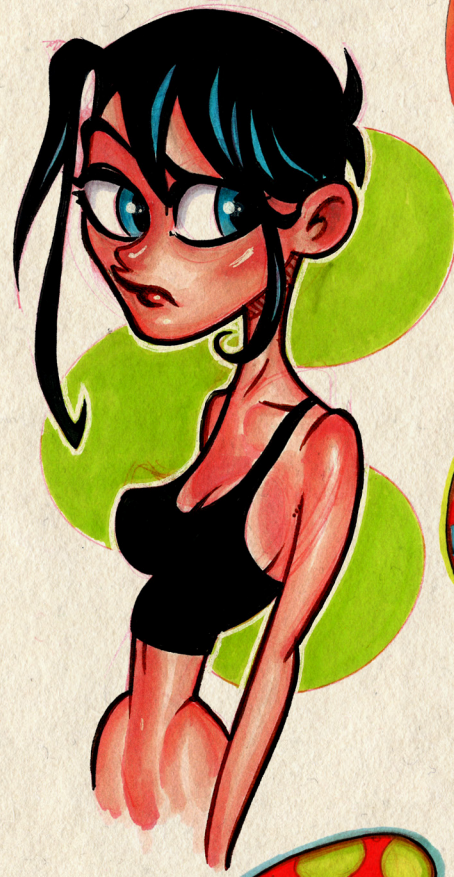
14 At the beginning of my time on the *Little Big Planet* franchise, I used thick charcoal pencils for my concept pieces. I love the tight, tiny little fiddly detail lines, but there's something to be said sometimes for letting the eye do the work for an artist.

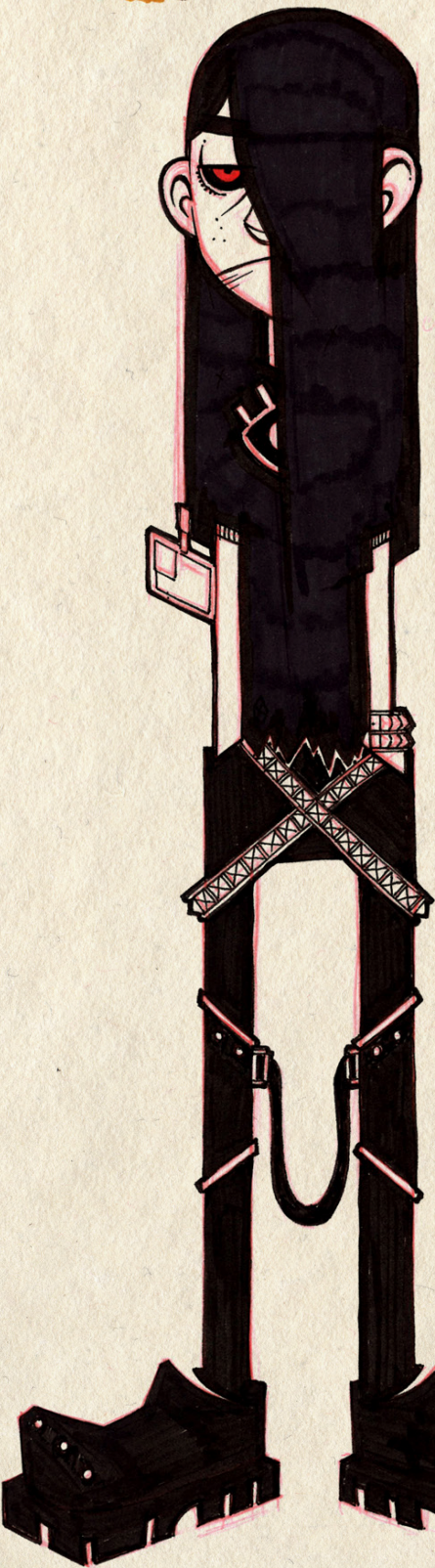
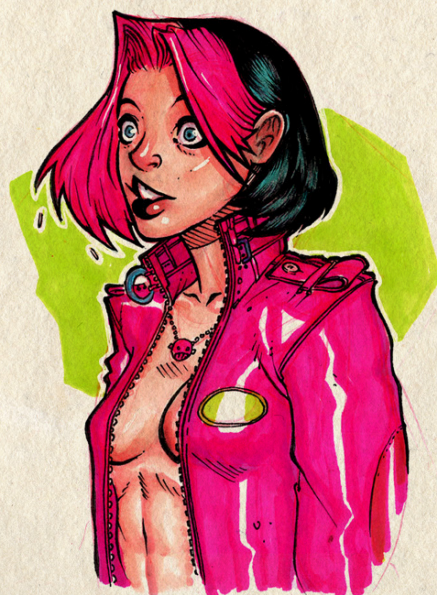
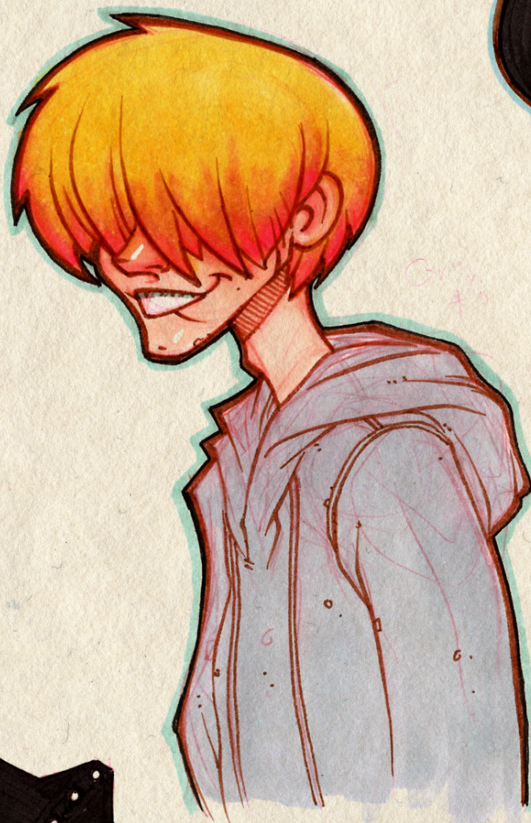
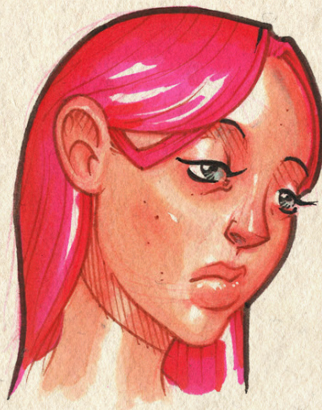
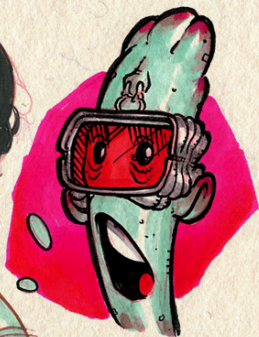
15 Markers, markers, markers. Markers with pencils, markers with black pens, markers with charcoal, markers with brown pens. I like to test what things will look like. I recently bought pencil leads from the Czech Republic because I couldn't find them anywhere else. Testing, learning and subsequently showing my work equals bliss.

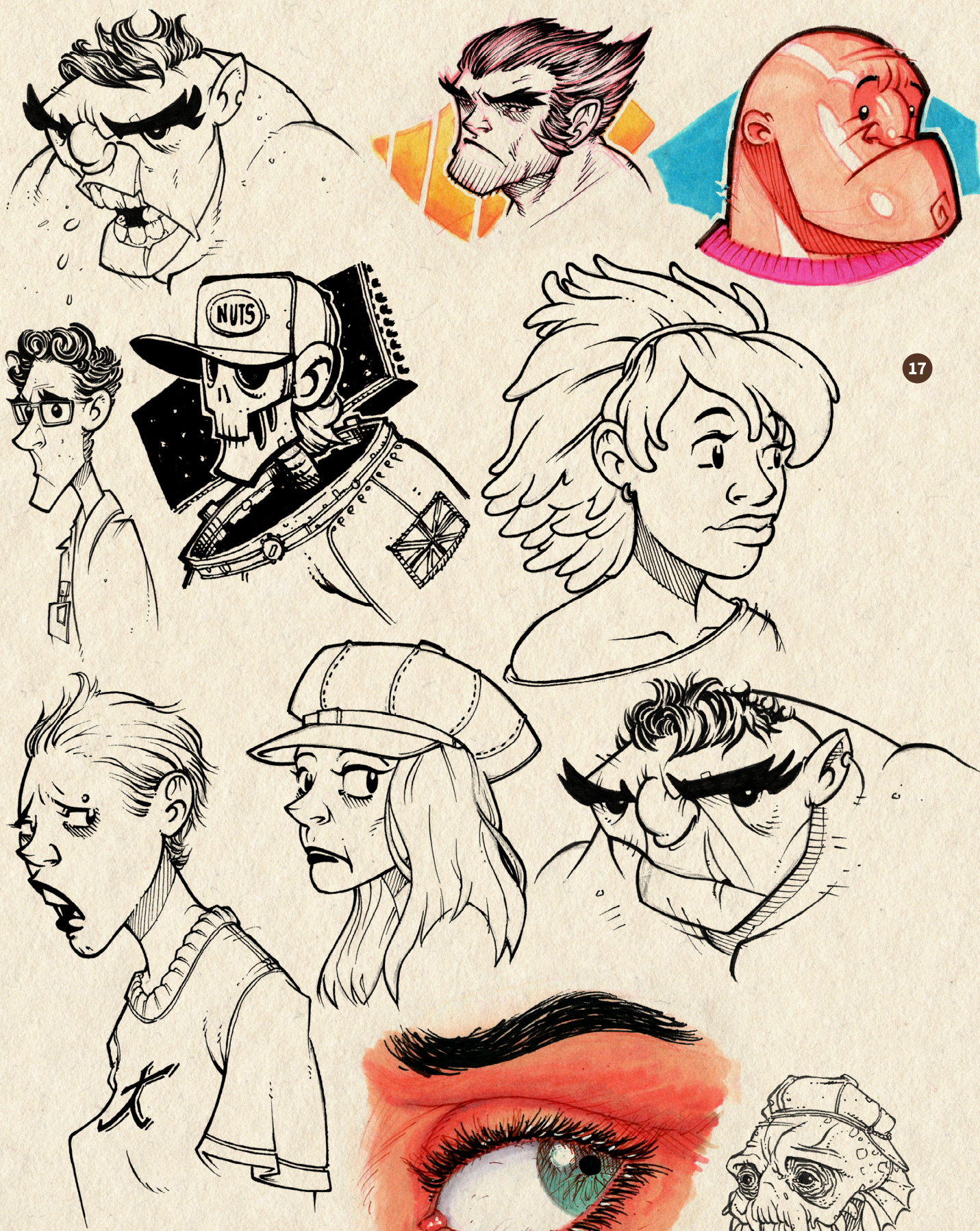


"NAY Nū Shop"

14







17

16 Prismacolor people from buses, coffee houses, vacations and more. As I get faster and faster with markers and sketching I can capture the things I am attracted to in random folks and keep these things near when I need to make my next comic or game character.

17 Inks. I personally 'pull' lines. Meaning, when inking, I start my hand/lines farther away from me, and pull the pen towards me. I find that 'pushing' for me tends to create wobbly lines. In the end it's your choice what feels best for you and gets you the results you want.

2dartist

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Italian digital artist Lorenzo Zitta knows how to create thought provoking still images with LightWave 11.6. Whether the still is computer-generated with LightWave, an artful arrangement of digital photos, or a combination of the two, the composition of the scene – with its attention to detail and unusual merging of objects – demands a closer look.

"Thanks to LightWave, I can quickly test many different approaches for my projects. I love bringing models into Layout and switching on Radiosity, then start working on shading and lighting, bringing in more elements, and testing and improvising to get the look I want." - Lorenzo Zitta.

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Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



Crystal Sarcophagus

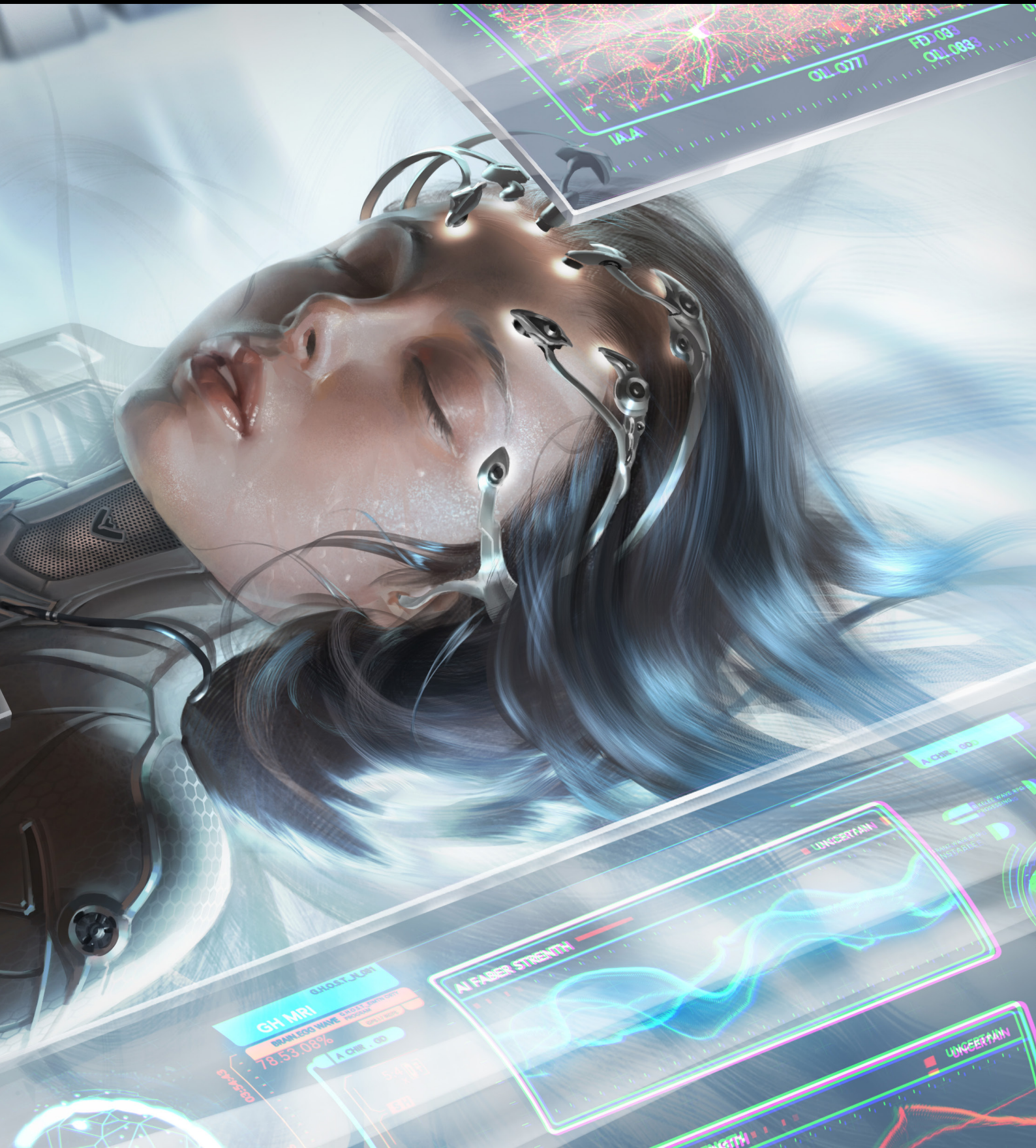
G-host Lee

Software used: Photoshop

Web: g-host-lee.artstation.com



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Child of Emptiness Advanced

Cristina Lavina

Year created: 2013

Web: cargocollective.com/cristinalavina

Done in Opus Artz Ltd. for ©Applibot, Inc./

Legend of the Cryptids





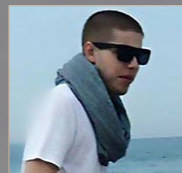
Te Honunui

Dane Madgwick

Year created: 2014

Web: danemadgwick.com





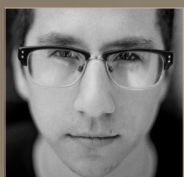
Little story

Kolobaev Mark

Year created: 2015

mous.squarespace.com

© Mousart



The Outpost

Eytan Zana

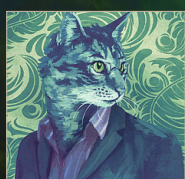
Year created: 2015

Web: zanabrush.com

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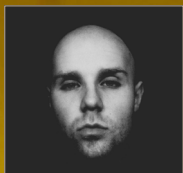


Deep

Sylvain 'Tohad' Sarrailh

Year created: 2014

Web: tohad.artstation.com



Tomcat series

Piotr Jablonski

Year created: 2014

Web: [behance.net/nicponim](https://www.behance.net/nicponim)





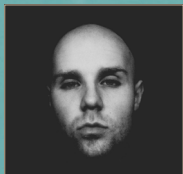
Welcome to Neo-Amsterdam

Wouter Gort

Web: woutergort.blogspot.com

© Wouter Gort





Tomcat series

Piotr Jablonski

Year created: 2014

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Golden golem

Francisco Badilla

Year created: 2014

Web: badillaflloyd.deviantart.com



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The Artist



Matt Tkocz

mattmatters.com


Software Used:

Photoshop

Born and raised in Poland and Germany respectively, Matt moved to California to study Entertainment Design at Art Center College of Design in 2008. After graduating in 2012, he went on to work in the film, game and theme park industry as well as dabble in teaching at various institutions.



Design vehicle concepts

Discover Matt Tkocz's creative workflow for designing and rendering a cool futuristic dune buggy. Matt covers techniques and top tips for creating thumbnails, using photos and presenting your concept 



Learn how to design and render cool vehicles...

The brief for this tutorial was to share my process when designing and rendering a futuristic dune buggy in Photoshop. Like with most of my design work, I like to separate the process into two phases which should (for the most part) not overlap:

1. Content
2. Presentation

When I speak of 'content' I usually refer to the actual design of the object/subject I am developing. By 'presentation' I mean painting, rendering, 3D modeling... anything to make the picture pretty to help sell my content.

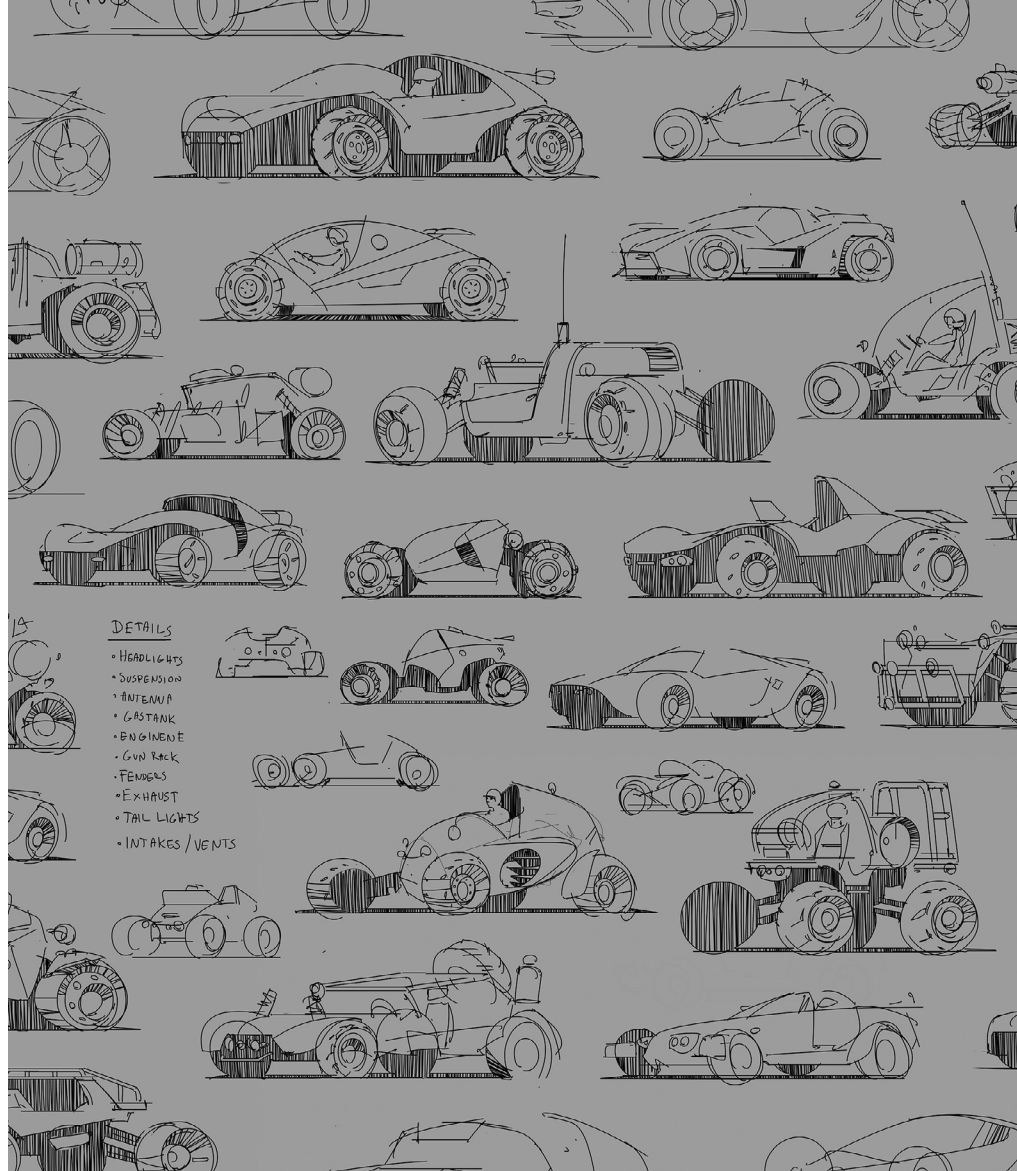
The reason for this separation is that I am a sucker for pretty pictures and always get carried away with rendering before nailing a decent design first. Whenever I'm developing a design, I intentionally limit my tools and perspective choices to the bare minimum to not get distracted by cool reflections, fancy angles, bounce lights and so on.

There are many artists and designers out there who have the ability to work on both simultaneously. They can produce a gorgeous painting while – at the same time – generating a strong design. However, I'm not one of these people, so I prefer to keep the process as neat and organized as possible so I don't stumble along the way.

01 Thumbnailing: Almost always, my first step is line sketching. It is a very old fashioned way of approaching a design but to me, drawing is still the most intuitive way of communicating thoughts rapidly. When I do these kinds of scribbles, I think of them more as notes rather than drawings because their purpose is to put down thoughts – not to look pretty.

Another thing that I do in this step – of course – is to look for reference images. The images I look for can range from functional details like suspensions or pistons, to more literal references of real world examples of existing dune buggy designs. I always try to find the obscurest possible sources for my reference images in an attempt to stumble on to

"If everyone always referenced the same images, the designs would end up looking the same"



something more original than I would just using Google; because if everyone always referenced the same images, the designs would end up looking the same.

02 Design: When I feel like I can't come up with any more sketches, I pick my favorite few thumbnails and try to squeeze every last bit of potential out of them by warping, tweaking, stretching, combining them and so forth. I try to make sure that I don't overlook something valuable.

When judging a design I usually consider four categories (in the order of importance):

1. Appropriateness
2. Believability
3. Aesthetics
4. Originality

Appropriateness is about context. Does it serve the story? Is it appropriate for the target demographic? Does the style match the rest of the intellectual property? To me, this is the most important need a design has to fulfill.

Believability essentially means functionality. Is the design's realism convincing in the context of the story? Does it look familiar enough so that the audience will understand and accept it in the context of the IP?

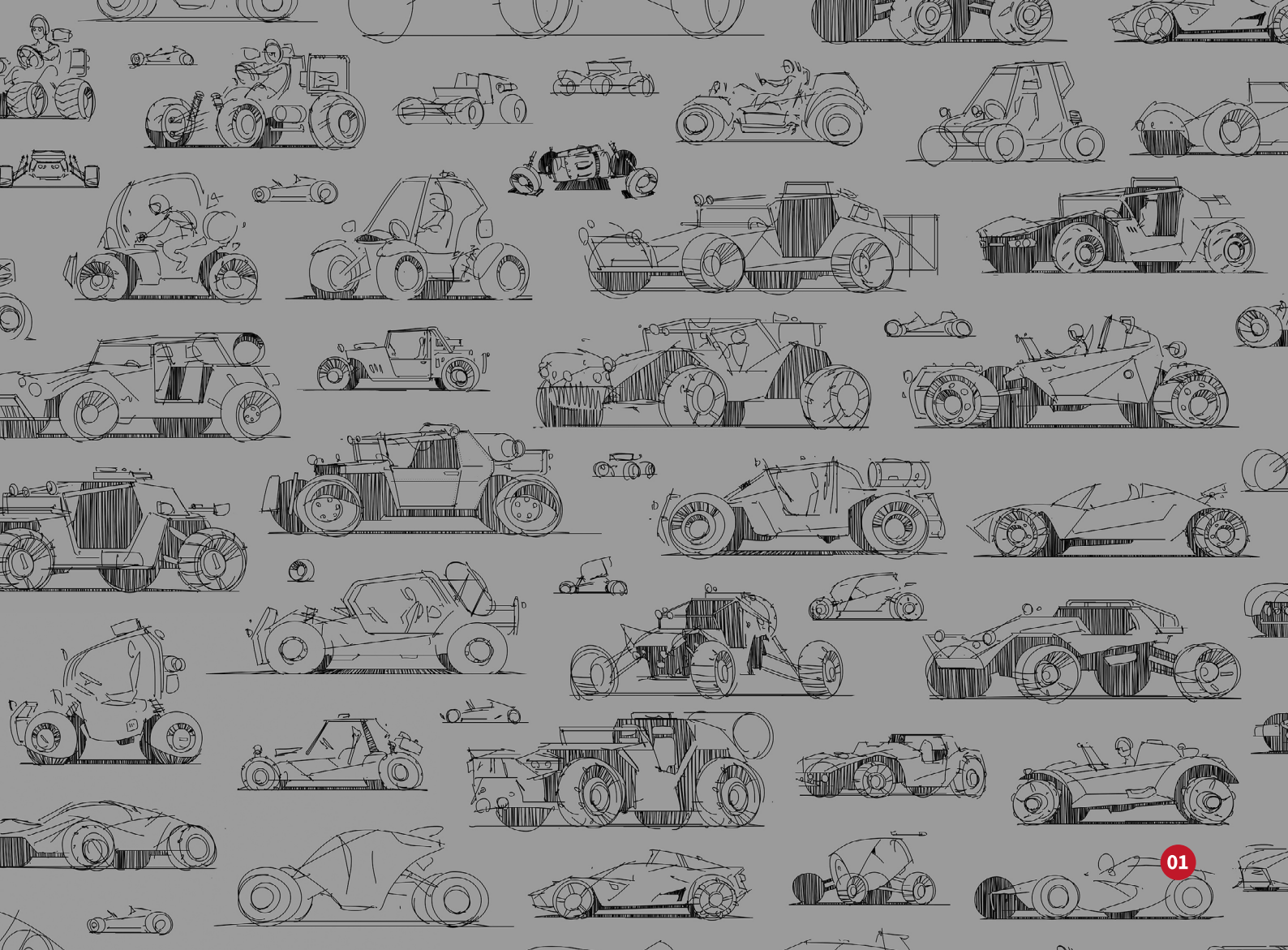
Aesthetics deals with how pleasing the design is to the eye. Are the proportions, stance, silhouette and composition attractive? Does it look badass and fun?

Originality is – for my money – the least important need a design has to serve. If the design is iconic and unique that's great; as long as it doesn't sacrifice points from the other three criteria.

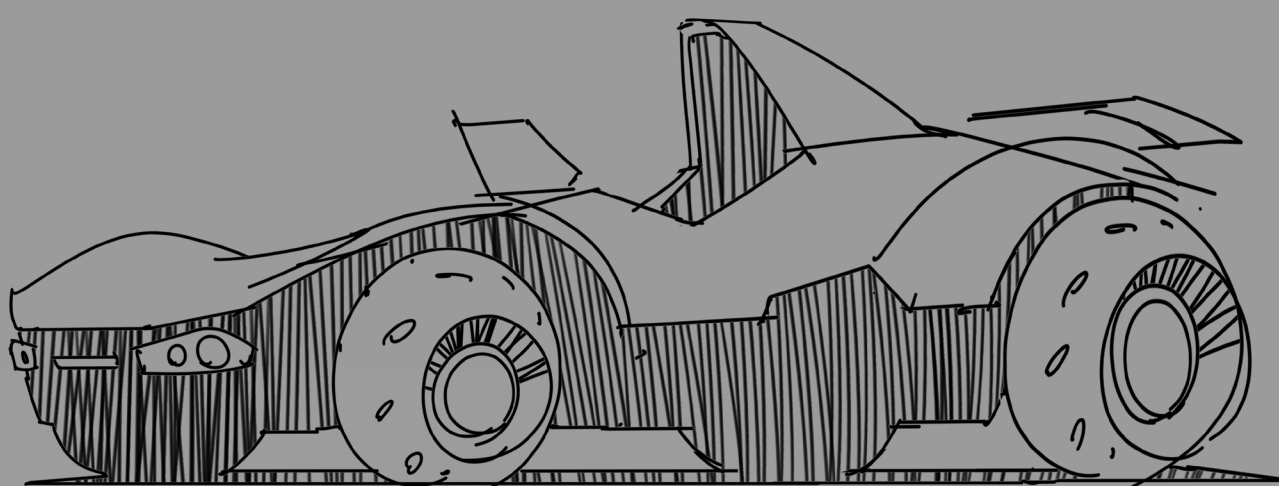
And of course there are special circumstances and exceptions, so feel free to take these notes with a grain of salt. ►

01 Leave no stone unturned when figuring out a design

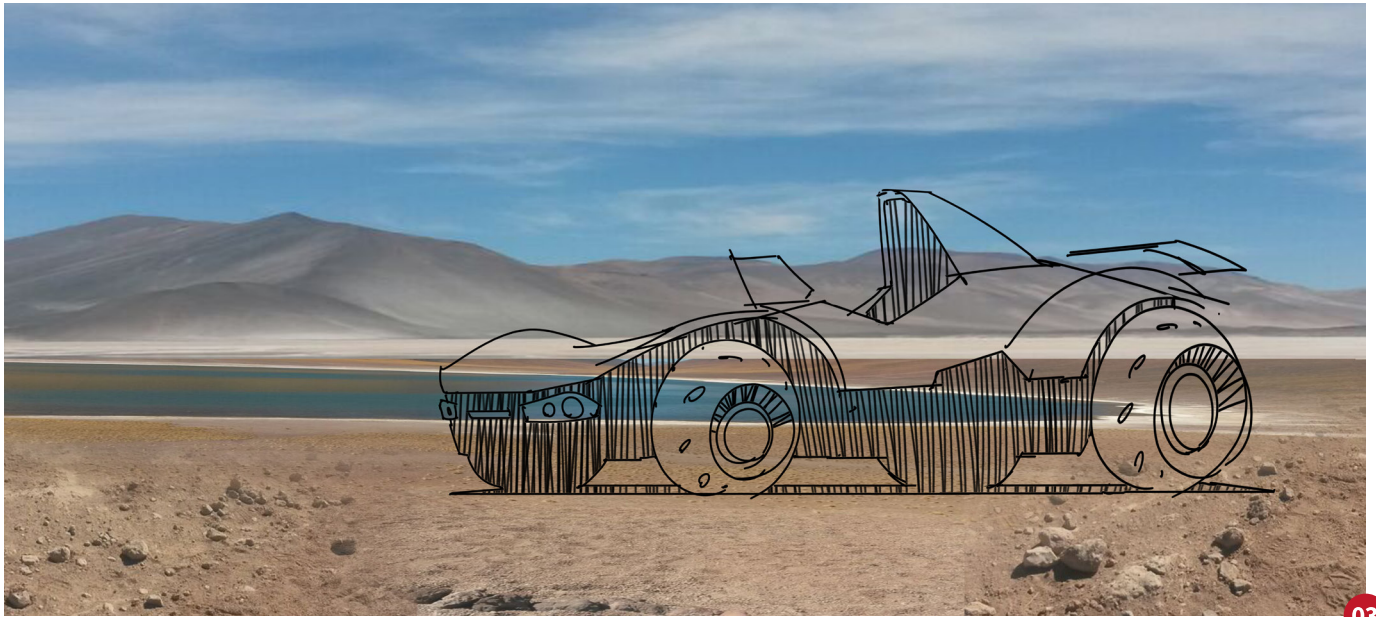
02 This is the thumbnail that best serves the needs of the design brief



01



02



03 Environment: I compose a rough placeholder environment from photographs a friend of mine sent me from Chile. The reason I start introducing an environment at this early stage is that seeing the vehicle in a context will hopefully inspire me with further design decisions.

I very rarely present designs isolated against a neutral background, because seeing something in its natural habitat is an easy way to double check whether or not it fulfills the design brief at first glance, and a good way to sell your client on the design as only few can resist the charm of a full color illustration.

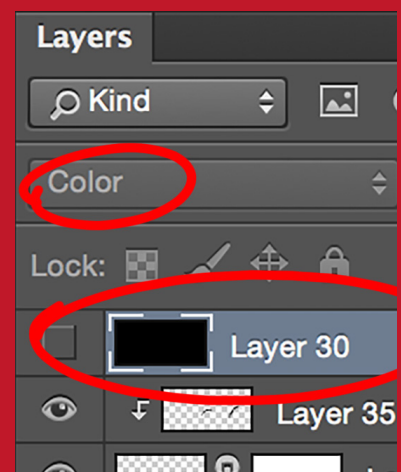
04 Block in: Here I begin to block in the big shapes of the vehicle to get a better feel for its proportions. I do this on a layer between

⚡ PRO TIP

Double check values

Many designers and artists prefer to figure out the values of their designs and paintings before they jump into color. That approach never quite worked for me as I have trouble finding colors that match the previously chosen value.

Instead I keep a grayscale adjustment layer on the very top of my image so I can quickly double check my value structure. Every once in a while I just enable this layer to be able to judge my values more easily. If I spot issue areas, I disable the grayscale layer and deal with the problem in color.





the background and sketch layer. Looking at it as solid shapes helps me judge the vehicle's proportions and visual weight easier. I don't worry about the three-dimensional volumes of the buggy as much as the two-dimensional graphic read at this point. I can always figure out the final shape later.

The other day I was at the Singapore airport and saw those little golf cart-like buggies driving around the terminal. When I saw their puffy little wheels I thought those could look great on my dune buggy. So I took a quick photo and dropped them in my piece. I select the wheel in the photo using the Polygonal Lasso tool and copy-and-paste it onto my image (Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V), then you can use Edit > Free Transform to scale and skew to fit in with the image.

05 Refinement: I merge (Layer > Merge Down) all the layers of the vehicle's body

so I can work on it more intuitively and quickly. And generally speaking I always try to work with as few layers as possible to not overwhelm myself. In this step I'm fixing symmetry and perspective issues, as well as refining the shapes some more.

This is a tricky step in the design process. While I'm trying to fix some of the design flaws and perspective issues, I must be careful not to venture too far from the aspects of the sketch that got me attracted to it in the first place. So as I'm tweaking the shapes and proportions I always keep an eye on my original sketch, constantly re-evaluating to make sure to maintain the gesture and energy from the original thumbnail.

06 Integration: I'm taking a break from the vehicle design to spend some time on the environment and its integration with the vehicle. I push and pull the values of the image ▶

03 Giving the design context in the form of an environment can inform upcoming design decisions

04 Blocking in the big masses of the sketch instantly helps to judge its proportions and silhouette

05 Resisting the overwhelming urge to begin rendering adds valuable time to the design process and can save the design

06 Adding some drama to the environment can help make the whole illustration more dynamic and exciting

to increase the scale, depth and clarity of the vehicle's silhouette. You can do this by using the Adjustment Layers and moving the sliders, or altering the curves until you reach the desired effect. I'm not very happy with the mood of the image, and try to push it to something much more dramatic and less inviting by darkening the sky and casting a big shadow on the mountains in the background.

I cast a soft shadow on the foreground to separate it from the middle ground and further increase the sense of depth. The buggy's cast shadow gets some attention to make it wrap more realistically around the rocky ground surface.

07 Volumes: Once I'm more or less satisfied with the two-dimensional graphic read of the image, I begin to define the volumes. For that I add a simple clear coat layer to the body of the vehicle allowing me to 'sculpt' the 3D shapes of the design. I also changed the color of the vehicle to red to make the cool tones in the reflections pop more.

Another way to indicate 3D form change is by adding highlights. I use them sparingly at this point as I don't want to render just yet. I only add subtle highlights to indicate form changes that can't be indicated with a sky reflection.

I'm adding secondary photo details such as headlights and a driver, painting on top just enough details to integrate them convincingly into the illustration.

08 Details and effects: At this point I do further subdividing and refining of the big shapes, adding color and value variations as well as cutlines and more photo details. When adding cutlines, I constantly remind myself that



“The majority of the important decisions have been made at this point so all that's left in the process is final details, polishing and making the illustration pretty”

it's not lines that I am designing but rather the shapes of the surfaces by dividing them with the added cutline.

The majority of the important decisions have been made at this point so all that's left in the process is the final details, polishing and making the illustration pretty.

I also apply a dust layer to the vehicle in order to ground it in its environment more. Finally I add some effects like a dirt pass (added with a scatter brush) and some blur to the lens (Filter > Blur > Lens Blur).

09 Orthographic views: Whenever making orthos, I usually start off with the most descriptive view. In the case of most land vehicles, that would be the side view. Once I lock the main shapes in the first view, I project out the hard points to the top and front view. From here it's usually a lot of going back and forth between the different views; adjusting, detailing, transferring, and re-adjusting.



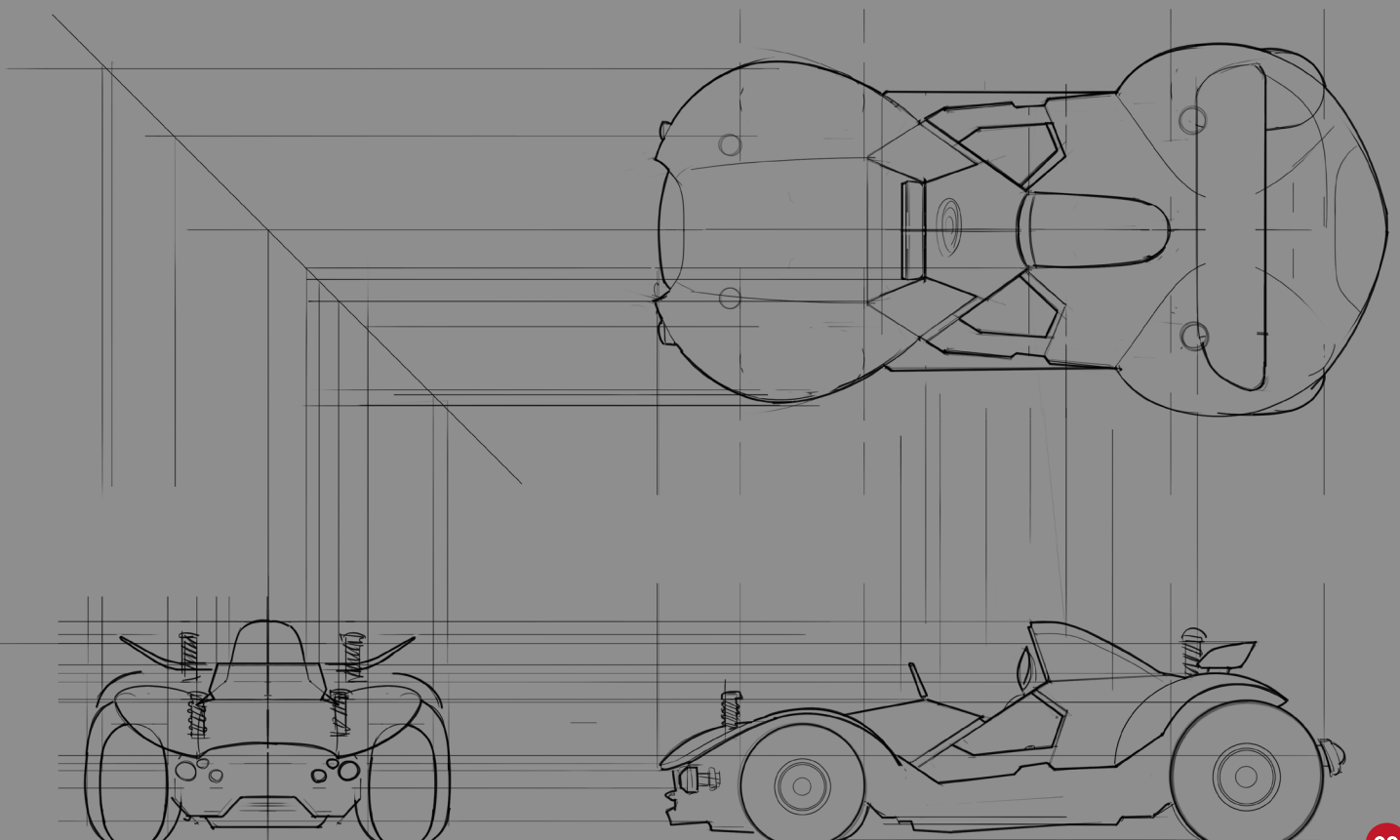


I don't go out of my way to stay 100% true to the design I already figured out beforehand – if I see an opportunity for improvement I'll go for it and adjust the illustration later on. I try to stay flexible and work organically until the design is complete. ●

07 Adding a subtle hint of reflectivity with clear coat layers is all it takes to start defining the three-dimensional volumes of the dune buggy

08 Adding detail and areas of high contrast selectively can help lead the viewer's eye

09 Orthographic views ready to hand over to a 3D modeler



The Artist



Matt Tkocz
mattmatters.com





TKOCZ '15

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Issue 110 | February 2015

110

130

pages of
inspiration and
techniques

Design Vehicle Concepts

Matt Tkocz shares his process for designing
and rendering a futuristic dune buggy



+plus

Paint fantasy characters

Improve your color and composition with a look behind the process of Emily Chen's image

Mastering colored pencils

Marco Mazzoni shares his stunning flora and fauna renders

10 of the best digital images

Eytan Zana and Cristina Lavina feature in this issue's gallery selection of our top 10 images

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FREE RESOURCES

Layered PSD files

The Artist



Jessica Rossier

jess-studio.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Originally from Switzerland, Jessica Rossier is currently living in France. She mostly works for films, videogames, or advertising companies by providing high-quality visual assets, as a concept artist and matte painter. Since 2008, she has worked with Bastien Grivet, and in 2013 they launched WARDENLIGHT studio in Montpellier.

Matte painting simple set extensions

Learn how to create a set extension matte painting in Photoshop with this step-by-step tutorial by Jessica Rossier 

Improve your matte painting skills with these pro tips...

In this step-by-step tutorial, I'll show you how to create a simple set extension by using only photographs and basic techniques. You will learn how to separate the foreground of an image from the background's sky by using the channels panel; how to separate all your elements and clean them up using different forms of selection tools; importing and adjusting new elements like the sky and mountains; how to add depth to your scene by using the same main image; and finally, how to blend all your elements in the final result with little color corrections.

In order to do this tutorial correctly, you just will need Photoshop (at least from CS6 version) and if possible a Wacom tablet. I have also supplied two PSD files containing the pre-masked mountains and of course, the PSD of the complete scene.

01 Analysis and selection of the main photo:

First, to create a matte painting I take the main photo where I'll create my future universe and I analyze the details and peculiarities of this picture (the perspective of the buildings, the direction of the light, intensity of lighting and so on). Then I choose several elements that will fit into my scene.

From this analysis I will also choose what items I'll keep or remove.

02 Remove the items:

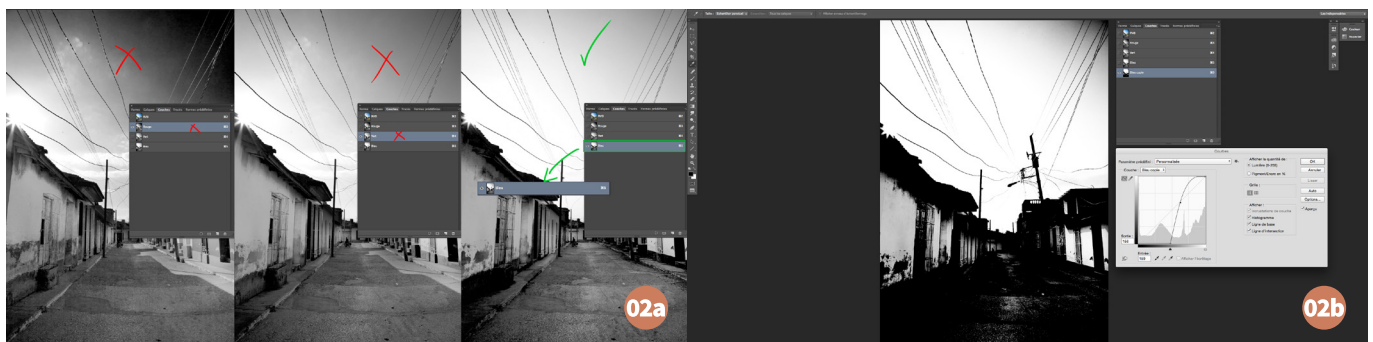
Now, as I know what I want to do, I start by erasing the sky from my scene. To do this you have many options, but for this blue sky I choose to work directly with the channels. ►

"I duplicate the blue channel because it is the one that offers the most contrast between light and dark"



- 01** 01a: The original main photo
01b: Analysis of the lighting direction
01c: Analysis of perspective elements
01d: Selection of the items to be removed

- 02** 02a: Selection of the best channel (blue)
02b: Get the most contrast by using the Curves panel



First I duplicate my main layer then I select the old one and open the Channels panel. I duplicate the blue channel because it is the one that offers the most contrast between light and dark. Now I need to have a maximum contrast between the sky and the roofs. So I press Ctrl+M to open the Curves panel and I give as much contrast as I can by dragging the first point down from the left to the right.

03 Light and dark: To finalize a perfect contrast between light and dark, I take my brush tool (preferably a Hard brush) and I paint all the bottom of the picture black. Then I erase all the cables from my scene with white (just paint over the cables and electricity poles to make them disappear).

Once this is done I make my selection by pressing the little circle at the bottom of the panel. I then go back to the Layers panel (click the main scene layer) and press the Delete key to erase the sky and the cables.

04 Isolate the details: Now, I would like to get back the cables and electricity poles in the scene. So I start by isolating the cables and electricity poles.

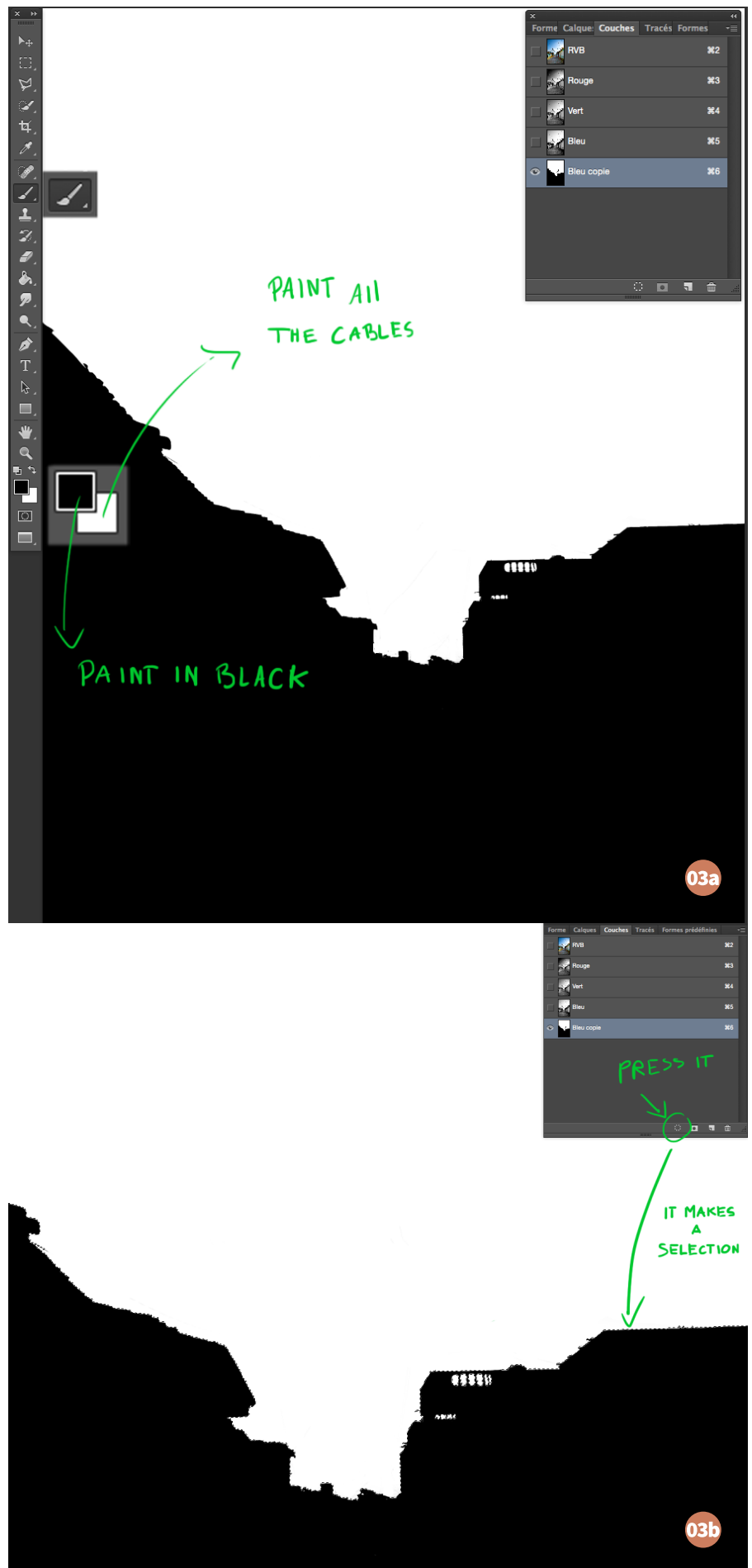
First, in the Layer panel I select my second layer (Cables). Then I go back into the Channels panel and I duplicate the 'blue' channel again. By using the Lasso tool I select the entire area of cables. I create a high contrast between the sky and the cables with the Curves panel (the same action as before in step 02). Once I have defined the best contrast, I deselect. Now I mask the roofs and houses with my white brush tool.

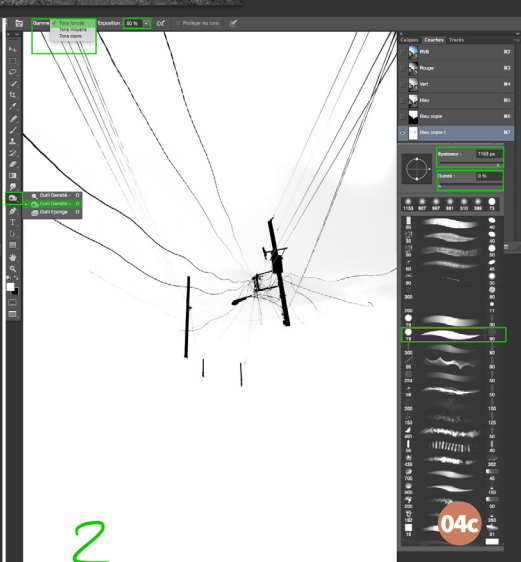
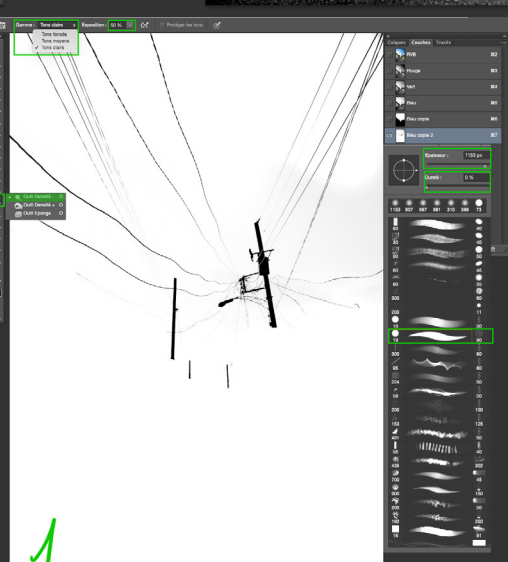
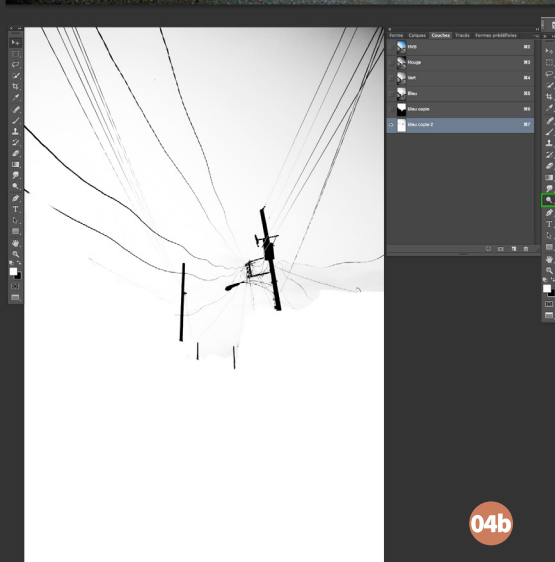
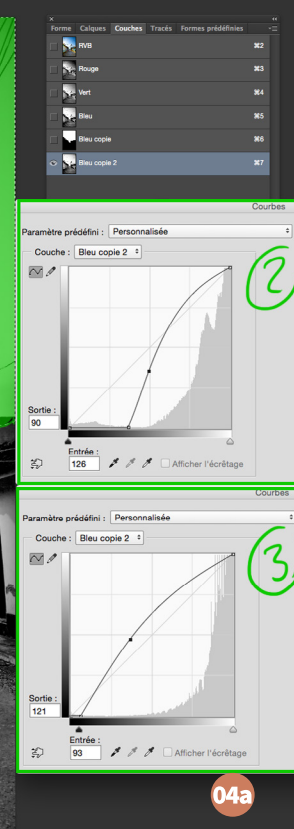
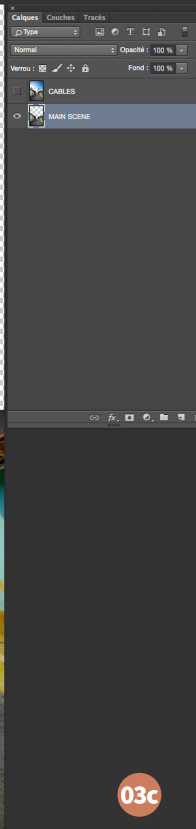
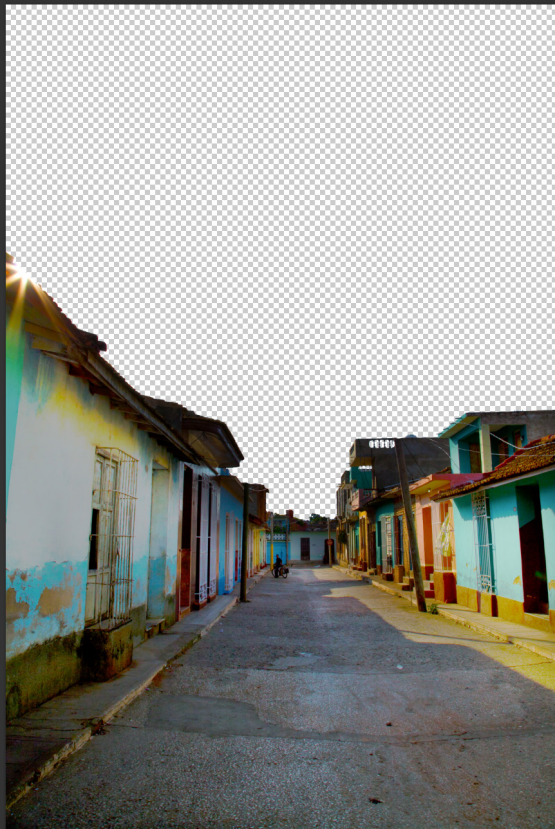
At this point several zones of the sky are too dark. Using the Dodge tool with a large Soft brush, I softly paint the parts of the sky that are too dark. Then I repeat the same action, but this time with the Burn tool in order to strengthen the cables. I paint using the appropriate pressure to strengthen the cables.

Once it's done, I press the little circle at the bottom of the panel and go back to the Layers panel. I click on the second layer (Cables) and press delete.

05 Change and cleaning the canvas: Now I have two layers – one with my houses and roofs without the sky, and another one with the cables and electricity poles only. At this point I need to do a first cleaning pass of the scene.

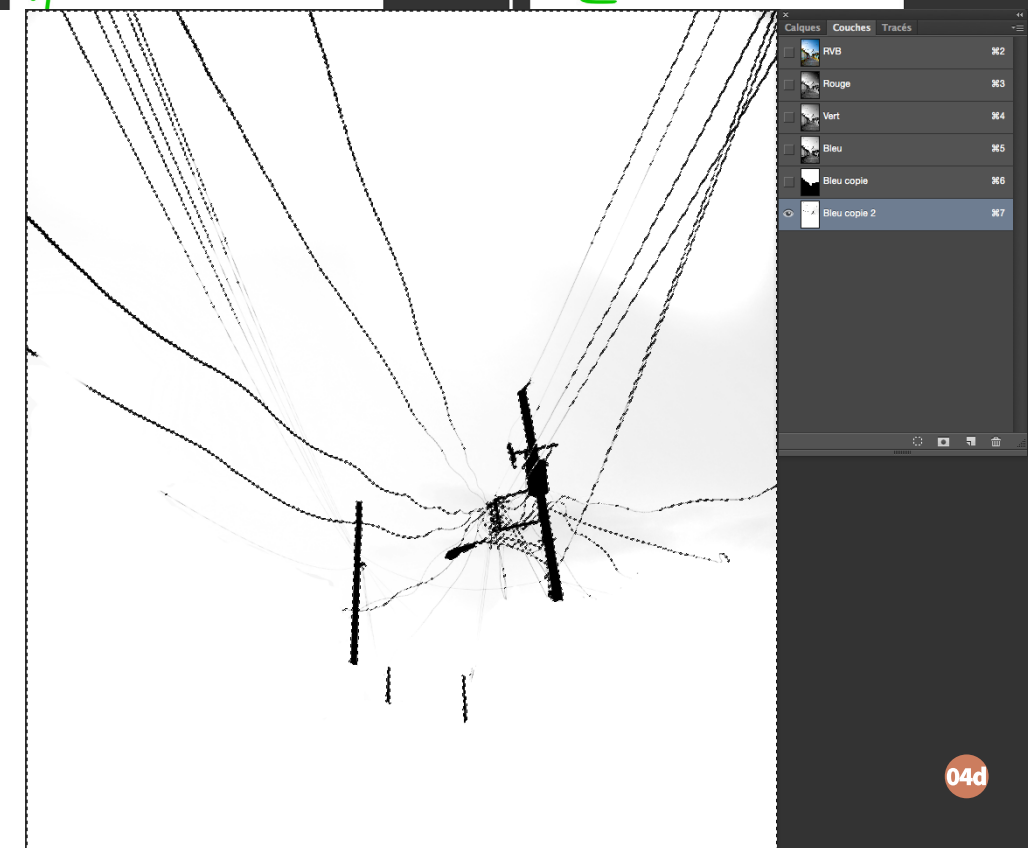
I choose to erase the lens flare effect on the left. In order to do this I select a similar piece of the roof ►

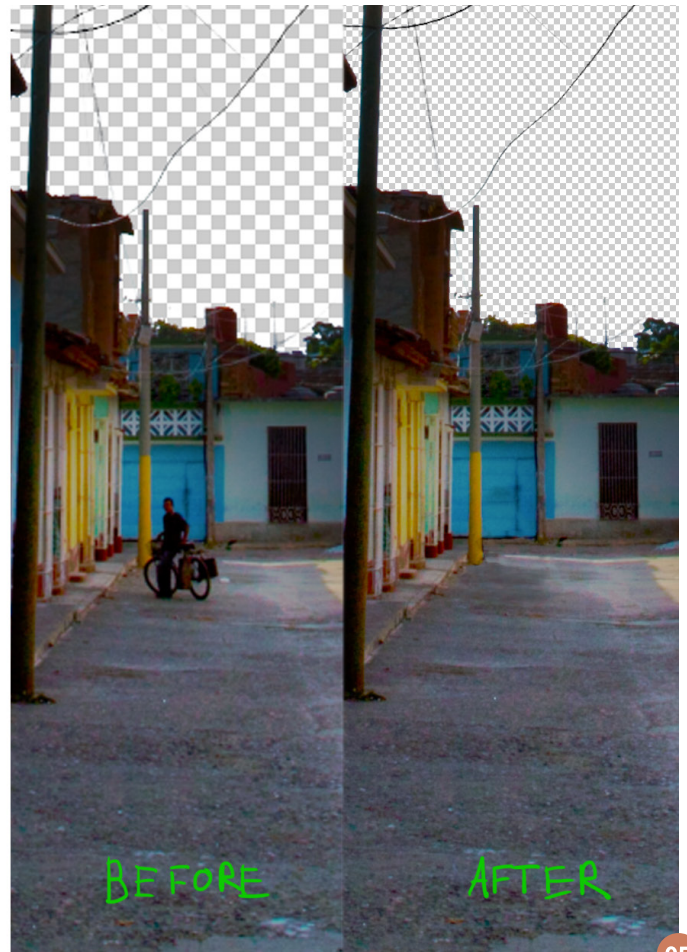




- 03 03a: Using the brush tool to paint the white and black zones
- 03b: Press the little circle to create a selection on the white zone
- 03c: The scene without sky and cables

- 04 04a: Using the Lasso tool to select the cables and electricity poles
- 04b: Painting the roofs and houses white with the brush tool
- 04c: Using the Dodge and Burn tool to separate the cables and strengthen them
- 04d: Press the little circle to create a selection around the cables





05

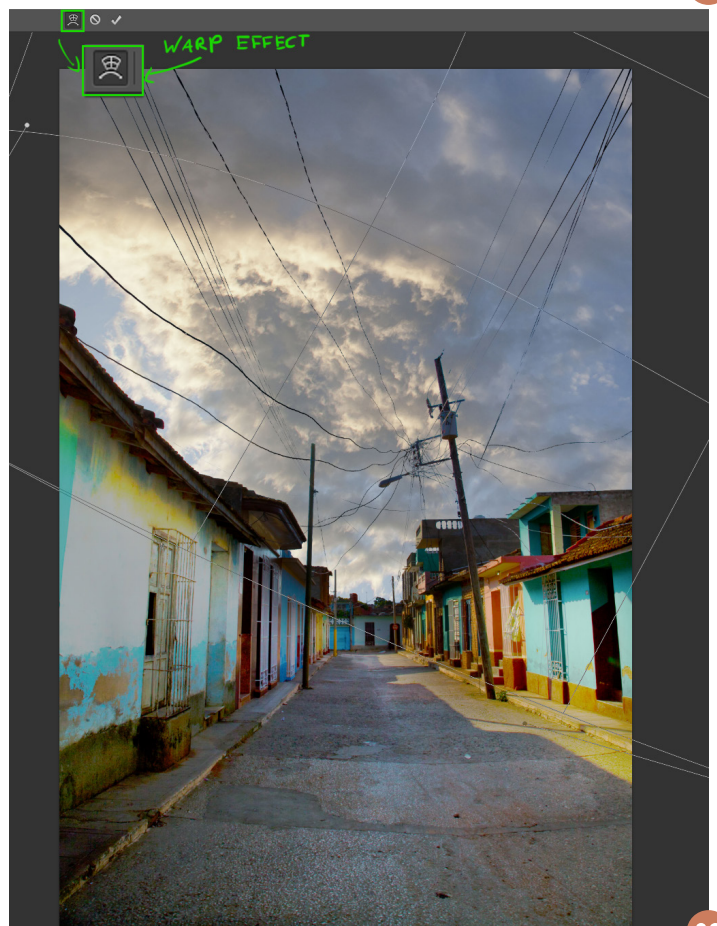
and duplicate it. I put my little piece of roof over the lens flare effect and I adjust the size of it in order to fit perfectly with the rest of the roof. Now I make that the man on the bike 'disappear' with the Clone Stamp tool.

06 Add the new sky: As I have finished cleaning the scene, I will now add the new sky. I import the picture named sky.jpg (downloaded from www.cgtextures.com) and place it below all the layers. I adjust the position in order to have the sun of the new sky in the right direction (use the Warp effect on the layer – Edit > Transform > Warp to get a better composition of the sky in the scene).

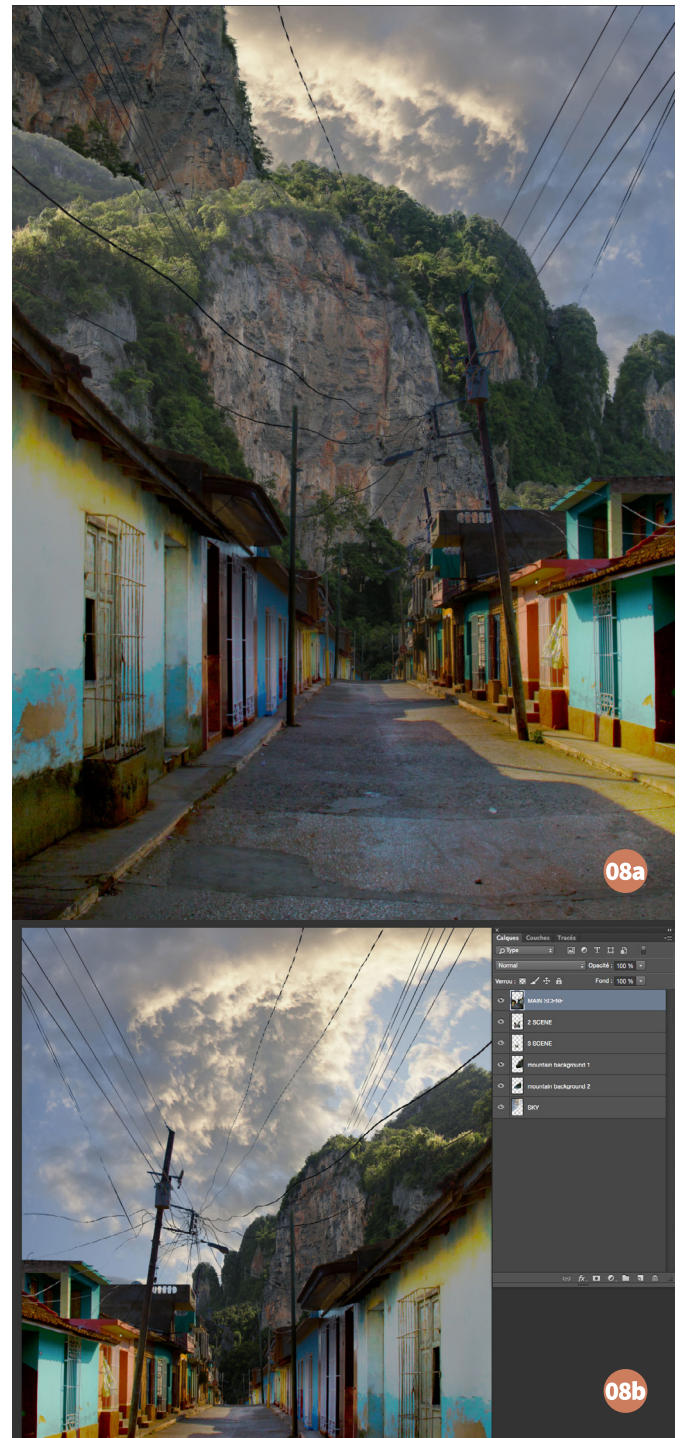
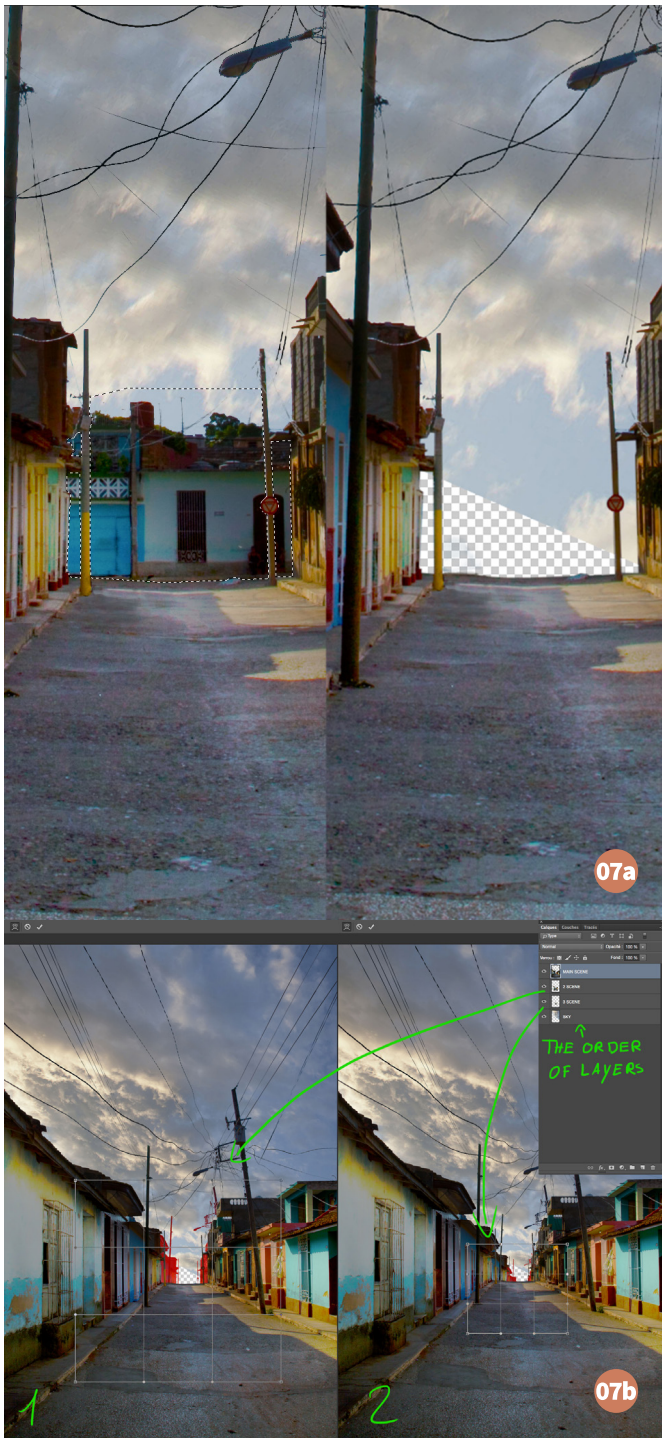
07 Creating the extension and the depth: So, it's time to come to the main point of our work: the extension of this scene. The purpose is to add more depth in the street.

First, I erase the end of the street (just after the little red road sign on the right) to open it up. I use my Polygonal Lasso tool and carefully select what I need to erase. (Tip: just before you delete go to the menu Select > Modify > Feather and put 0.5 and press OK — it makes a softer cut and it gives a better transition). Now, I can delete it.

The next thing I do is to merge the layer with the cables (Cables) on the main layer. I duplicate the main layer (with the houses and roofs) and resize it so that it's smaller and fits with the street's perspective. I then place this new layer under the main one (Main scene) to have the first extension of my scene. If necessary move it again in order to fit to the perspective correctly.



06



“I flip the canvas horizontally to have – from my personal viewpoint – a better composition”

The next step is to duplicate this extension layer and repeat the process to bring more depth to the street.

08 Add the background: In order to do a creative matte painting, I import two mountains to use for the background. I place them in the background layer (behind my roofs and house). I resize them and I use the Warp

effect to give them a satisfactory form. The layer ‘mountain background 2’ should be below the layer ‘mountain background 1’ in order to have a good composition and a good impression of depth. To finalize the scene, I flip the canvas horizontally to have – from my personal viewpoint – a better composition.

09 Clean and polish: As you have a composition of different pictures, it's necessary to clean and polish details to have a professional rendering. ▶

05 Clean and remove the unwanted items

06 Using the Warp effect to adjust the sky

07 **07a:** Use the Polygonal Lasso tool to select a part of the street

07b: Create an extension with the main scene

08 **08a:** Import the mountains and modify them

08b: Flip the canvas to bring a new viewpoint

First clean all the edges. I hold Ctrl and click into the thumbnail of the layer (a small square will appear) and all the elements of the layer are now selected. I contract my selection then I feather it. Now I inverse my selection (Shift+Ctrl+I) and when it's done I use my Eraser tool to erase the 'dirty' edge. I do this everywhere it's needed and I repeat this process for the other 'houses and roofs' layers.

For the cables (in case they are too light or thin), I select the layer where they are and press the little checkerboard (Lock transparent pixels) in the Layers panel. I then paint on the cables with a dark Gradient tool at 10%.

To create atmospheric depth between the two mountains and the street, I put one layer (ATMOSPHERE 3) above 'mountain background 2', one layer (ATMOSPHERE 2) above 'mountain background 1' and the other layer (ATMOSPHERE 1) above 'main scene'.

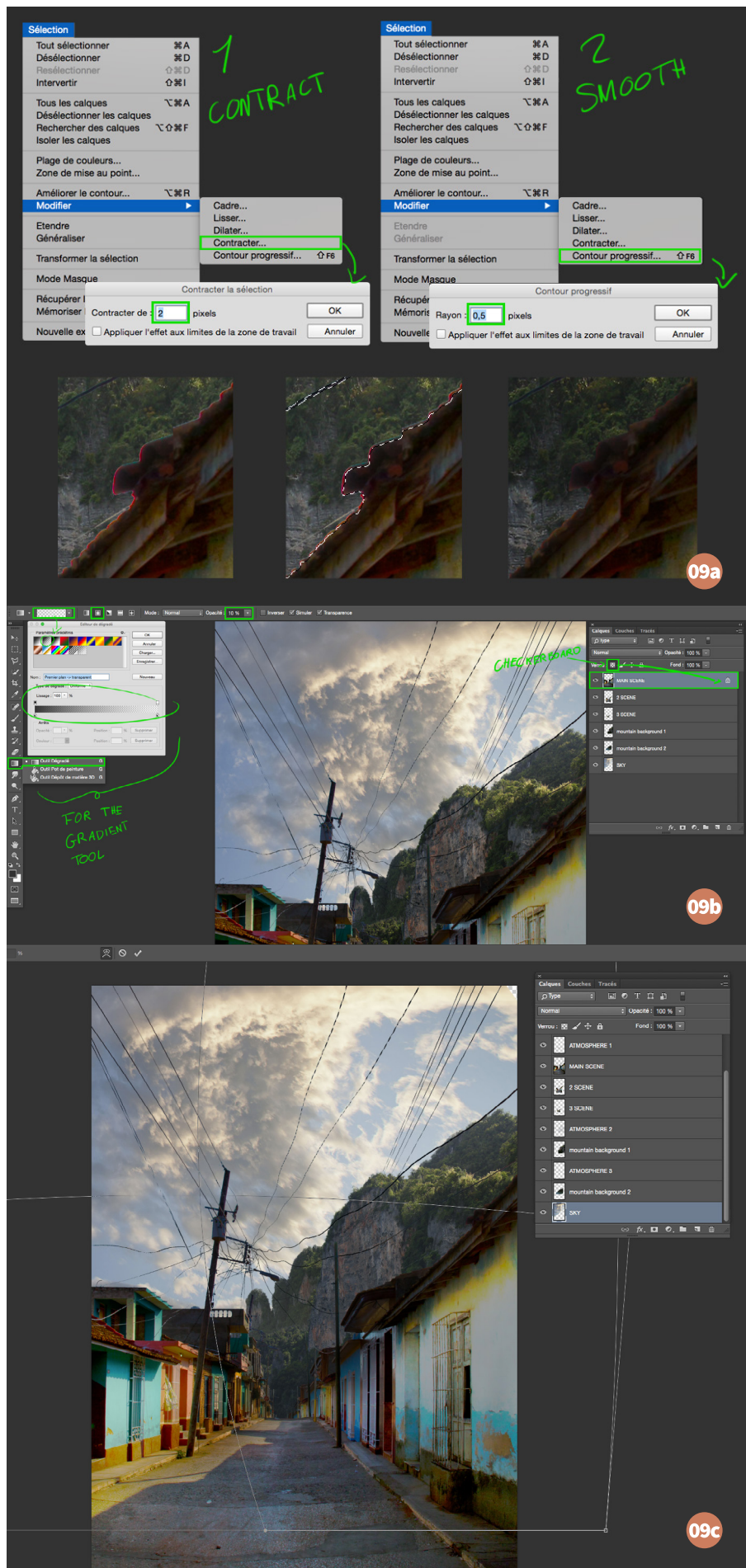
I go on the layer 'ATMOSPHERE 1' and create a selection from the layer below and paint with the Gradient tool at 10% using an appropriate color. Repeat the process for the layers 'ATMOSPHERE 2' and 'ATMOSPHERE 3'.

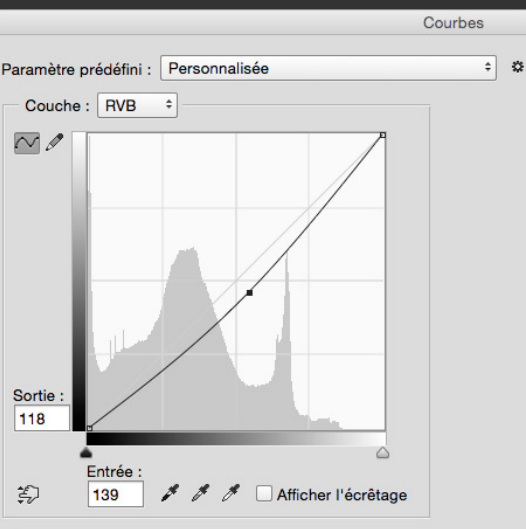
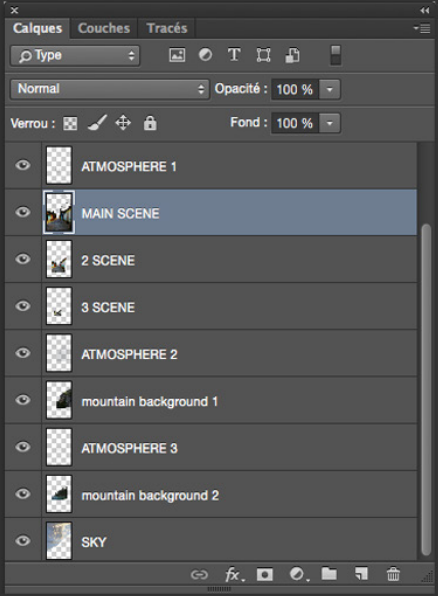
After that I distort the sky with the help of the Warp effect to fit it correctly with the scene.

10 Final Touch: I darken the 'MAIN SCENE' layer to fit to the global light (keep in mind that the closer your elements are to the viewer, the darker the shadows will be).

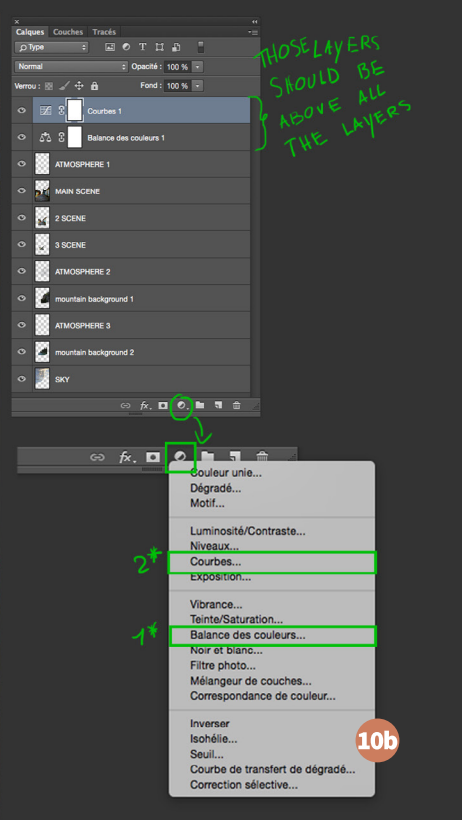
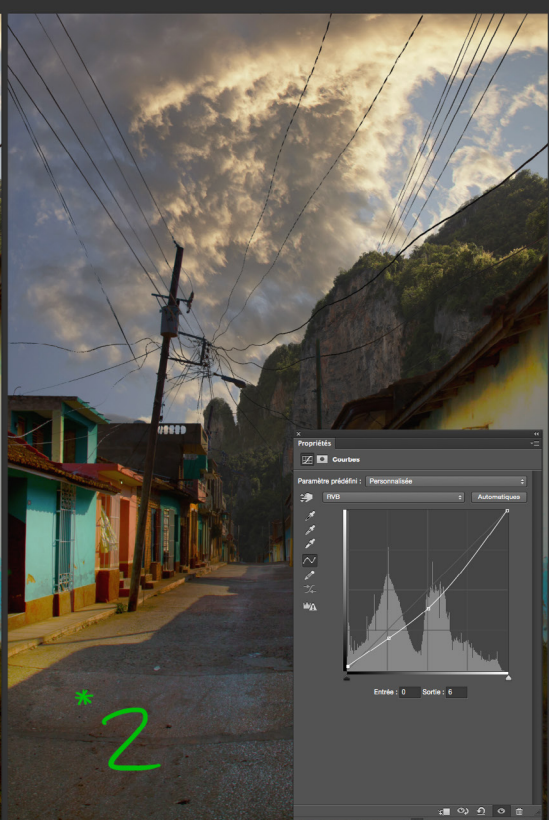
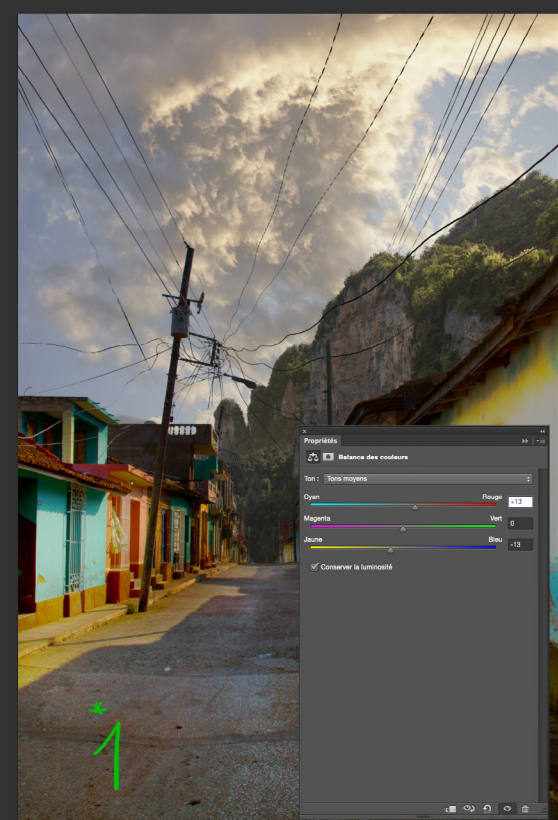
To improve the ambience of the scene, you can use several layer effects. The first I will use is a Color Balance layer effect in order to warm up the scene – it gives us a good sunset ambience. Then, I use the Curves layer effect, which helps to darken the scene because we are reaching the end of the day. So here we are with our final matte painting with a simple scene extension. ●

- 09** 09a: The process to clean the edges of the elements
 09b: Use Lock transparent pixels and the Gradient tool
 09c: Adjust the sky with the Warp effect
- 10** 10a: Use the Curves panel on the main scene to fit to the global light and contrasts
 10b: Work with the specific layers effects: Color Balance and Curves





10a



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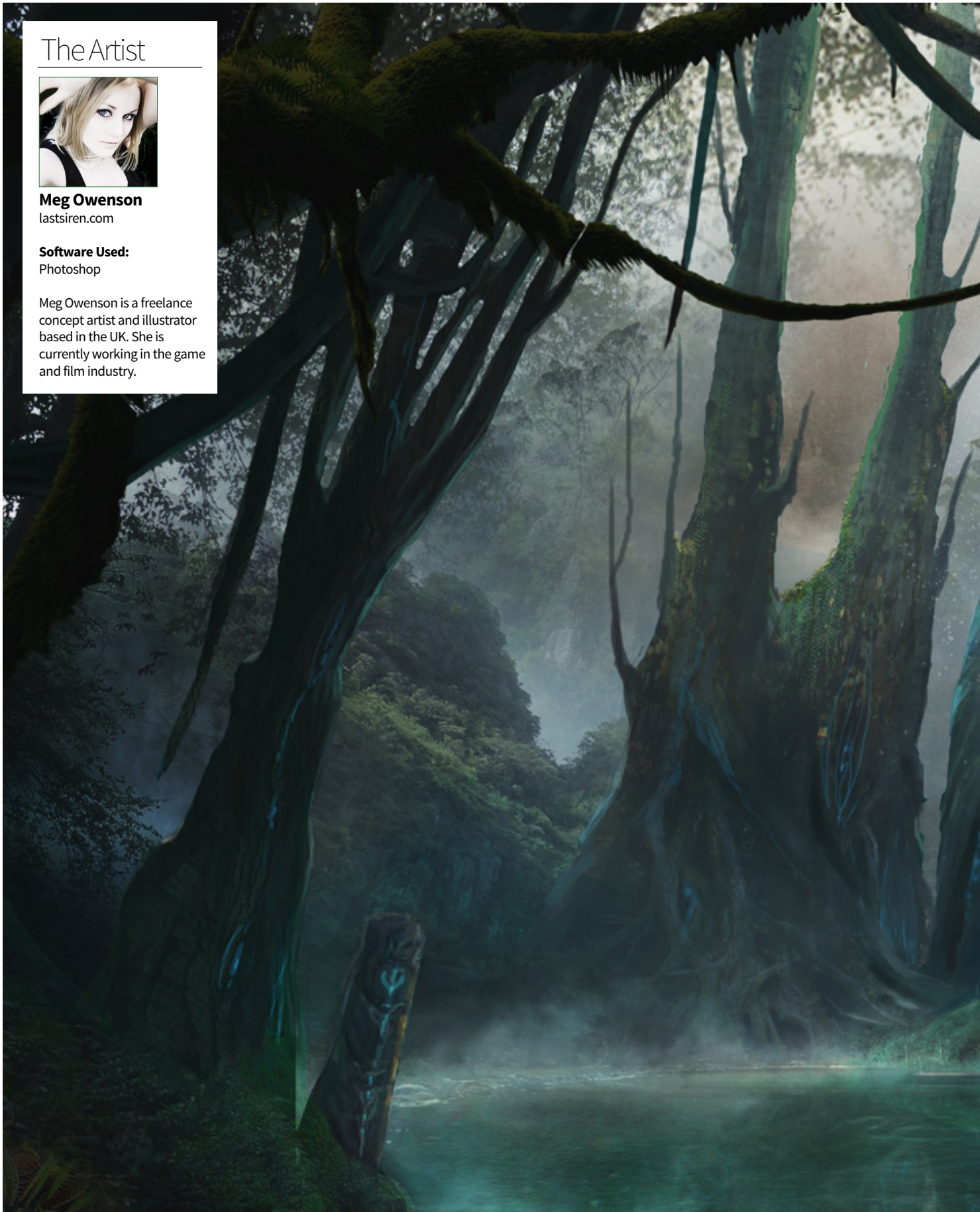
The Artist



Meg Owenson
lastsiren.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

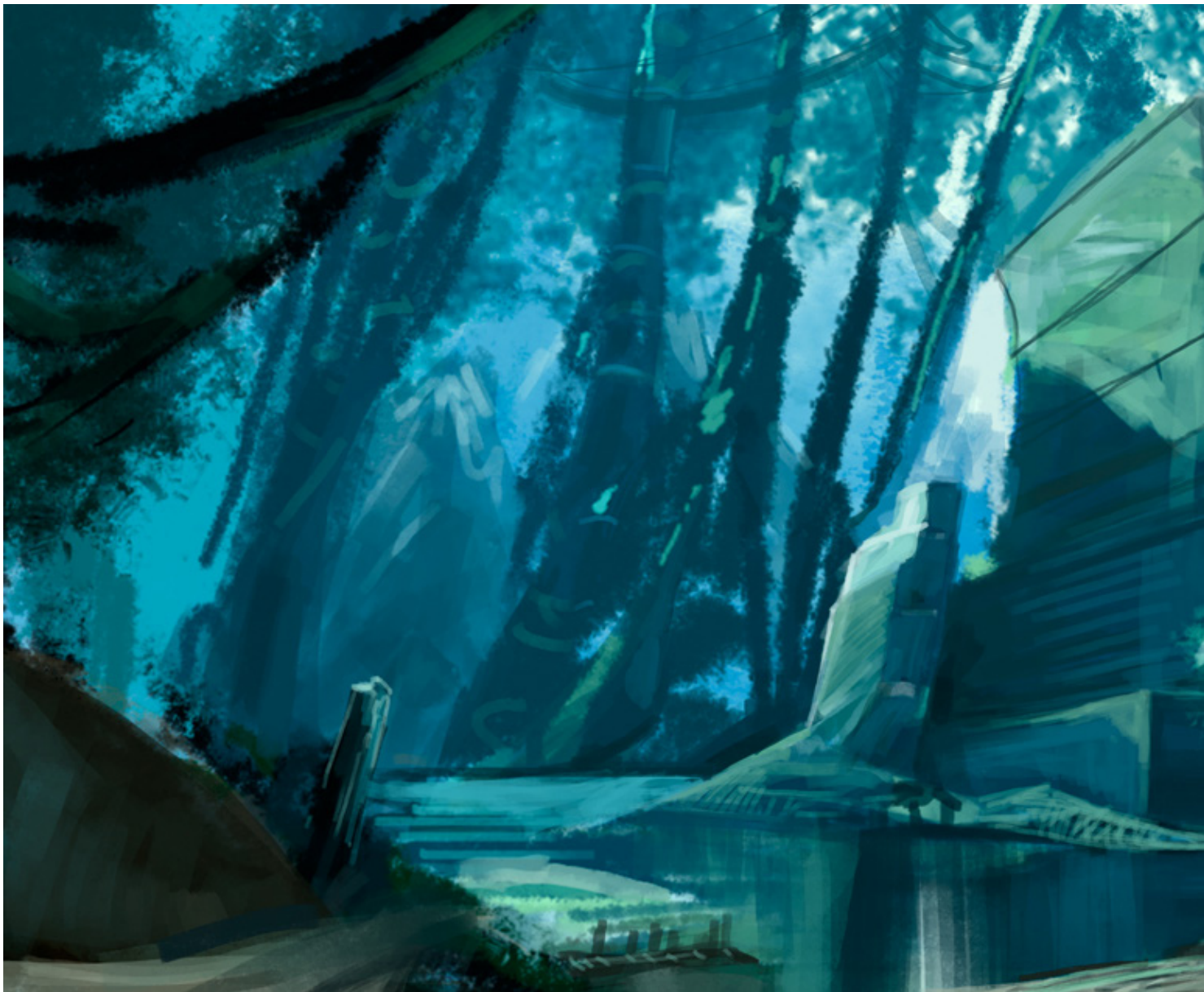
Meg Owenson is a freelance concept artist and illustrator based in the UK. She is currently working in the game and film industry.



Overcome a blank canvas

Meg Owenson demonstrates how to paint a fantasy environment in this step-by-step tutorial sharing useful tips and tricks to get you from an idea to a fully rendered composition [▶](#)





Create your own fantasy environment with the following techniques...

This tutorial aims to show you how I go about painting a fantasy environment. By showing you the steps I take, I hope to help you go from a simple idea to a fully rendered composition. I want to start by showing you that you don't need to wait for inspiration or fear a blank canvas. Instead, this tutorial shows you how to collect inspiration, reference images and expand your visual library.

I will then move on to how to mask and work on sections of your image, and I'll show you how to create areas of interest that will grab your viewers' attention. I'll demonstrate how to create uniformity in the painting, and lastly, I'll finish off by applying some effects and adjustment layers.

You don't need to wait for inspiration to strike, you can make it happen! Start filling your head with new visuals. For example, look at the photographs from National Geographic, read books, look at master artworks, ride the bus or go for a walk – do anything which allows you to see new things.

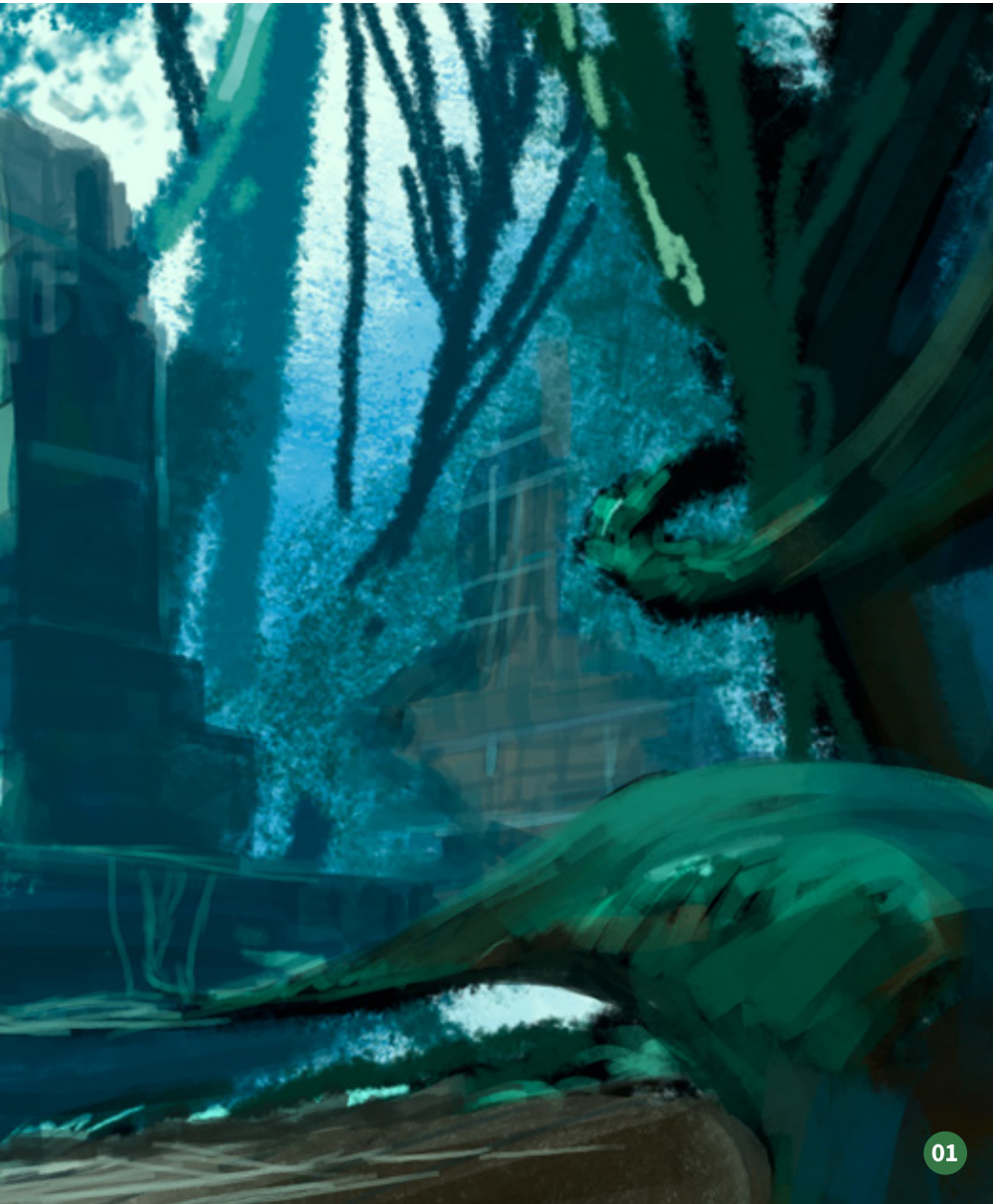
If you can go take photos, these will be great for both visual references and for textures later on. Then pick maybe three or four images/inspirations that you like and start thinking about how you can work them into a painting. My inspirations were a forest in China and the Waitomo Glowworm Caves in New Zealand.

01 Just paint! You need to get the ideas in your head out onto the canvas to see what works and what needs developing. Keep it simple – I'm only using three references for this

piece. This is so it doesn't look too disjointed. I want a forest, a blue glowing lake and some kind of ruin which a character could explore. I tend to work straight in color, but this step works just as well in black-and-white. It doesn't need to be neat; this is the time to experiment. Don't worry about textures or fancy brushes just pick one brush and start painting.

02 Values: This is an important part of a painting. A painting can have terrible colors but so long as the values work the image will read. The easiest way to see your values is to place a Hue/Saturation layer above your work and take the saturation right down to -100.

As objects recede into the distance they will get lighter and lose contrast. Objects closer to the foreground have more contrast and are darker in value. The sky will normally be the lightest part of your image. ►

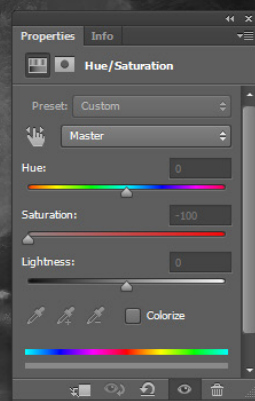


PRO TIP Use photo textures to aid your vision not dictate it

It is so important to start with a drawing or rough painting of what you want to create. Even if you aren't confident in your painting skills, do it anyway. Firstly it is good practice and secondly it gives you something to work towards. It is a blueprint for your final image. It doesn't matter if it's terribly painted; it will keep your whole piece focused and stop you going off on a tangent when you find that perfect photo texture of a waterfall or whatever else seems good at the time. If it's not in your blueprint it shouldn't go in. Stay focused, when you are using photo textures don't let them dictate your scene.

- 01** Laying down the first sketch in color
- 02** Getting your values reading well is the most important part of the process

“Remember to keep checking your values because adding photos to the image can alter them”





03



04



05



06

03 Masking: Once I'm happy with my composition, I place a vibrant colored layer beneath it, and start separating my image into sections by erasing different parts. You will need to duplicate your initial composition several times to get enough layers for everything you want to mask.

For example, I want the sky on one layer so I duplicate the image and erase out everything that isn't sky. The brightly colored layer beneath allows me to see where I'm erasing. I do this with the entire image and then name the layers.

04 Basic texturing: This is when it is good to take a lot of photos. If you don't have a library of your own then you can get photos from free sites such as www.freetextures.3dtotal.com and www.cgtextures.com.

Once I have the images I want to use to add texture and enhance my painting, I import them into Photoshop and attach them to the correct layer by holding Alt and clicking between the layers. I then use the Transform tool to position them. Using layer styles and lowering the opacity helps settle them into the painting. Remember to keep checking your values because adding photos to the image can alter them.

05 More painting: This is the stage where you can start refining the image. If you are struggling with color you can get a lot of color information from the photo textures. I don't want the photos to stand out to the viewer, so I paint over them until I am happy that the piece is looking uniform.



07

Remember, the textures should be adding to your composition not dictating what it contains. Don't get carried away and lose sight of that initial composition you painted.

06 Atmosphere: An overused but good trick to gain atmospheric depth and drama is to paint in smoke or in my case mist on the lake. I have all my sections of the painting separated so I can place mist layers behind and in front of key objects, such as the huge ruin in the center. This is crucial in order to keep the ruin's crisp edge. You can paint the mist with a big Soft brush and by altering the opacity levels. A good trick is to paint it on a Screen Layer and drop the opacity to get that eerie glow. ►

03 Use a bright colored layer to see where you are masking out your image

04 Begin to add photo textures at this stage

05 Blend the photo textures into your image by painting over them

06 Adding in mist or smoke creates atmosphere

07 Draw attention to your focal points by adding more detail



08



“If you refine only certain key areas and keep the rest of the image a little looser, your eye is automatically drawn to the areas”

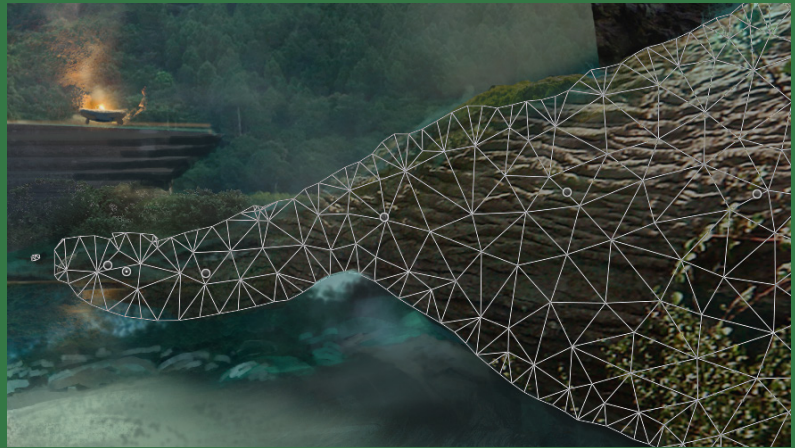
07 Refinement: Add a little more texture or paint just in the focal points. If you refine only certain key areas and keep the rest of the image a little looser, your eye is automatically drawn to the areas containing more refinement. For this piece I need to place more detail around the fires and the ruin itself. I also have smaller areas of detail around my character and the stone pillar to the left of the lake.

08 Flames/lighting: To get the flames to really pop I got a reference image up on a second monitor and studied the subtle color changes from the hottest part at the center to the flickering edges, and the soft brown colors in the smoke. Then with a Cloud brush and a super Soft brush I replicate the flames. I paint the smoke on a Screen layer. Then using a soft brown/orange brush on a Color Dodge layer paint the warm glow along the side of the ruin.

09 Final adjustments: This is when I merge my image down and start to play around with some final adjustments. Remember to keep a saved file that isn't merged just in case you need to go back to a layer.

PRO TIP The Puppet Warp tool

It will give you much more control over your textures. A handy tool when adding textures in Photoshop is to use the Puppet Warp. By pinning down your image in certain sections you can bend it carefully over tricky forms. This gives you more control than the Free Transform or Warp tool. It is especially good when you want to add bark to a tree you painted or adjust a limb on a character.

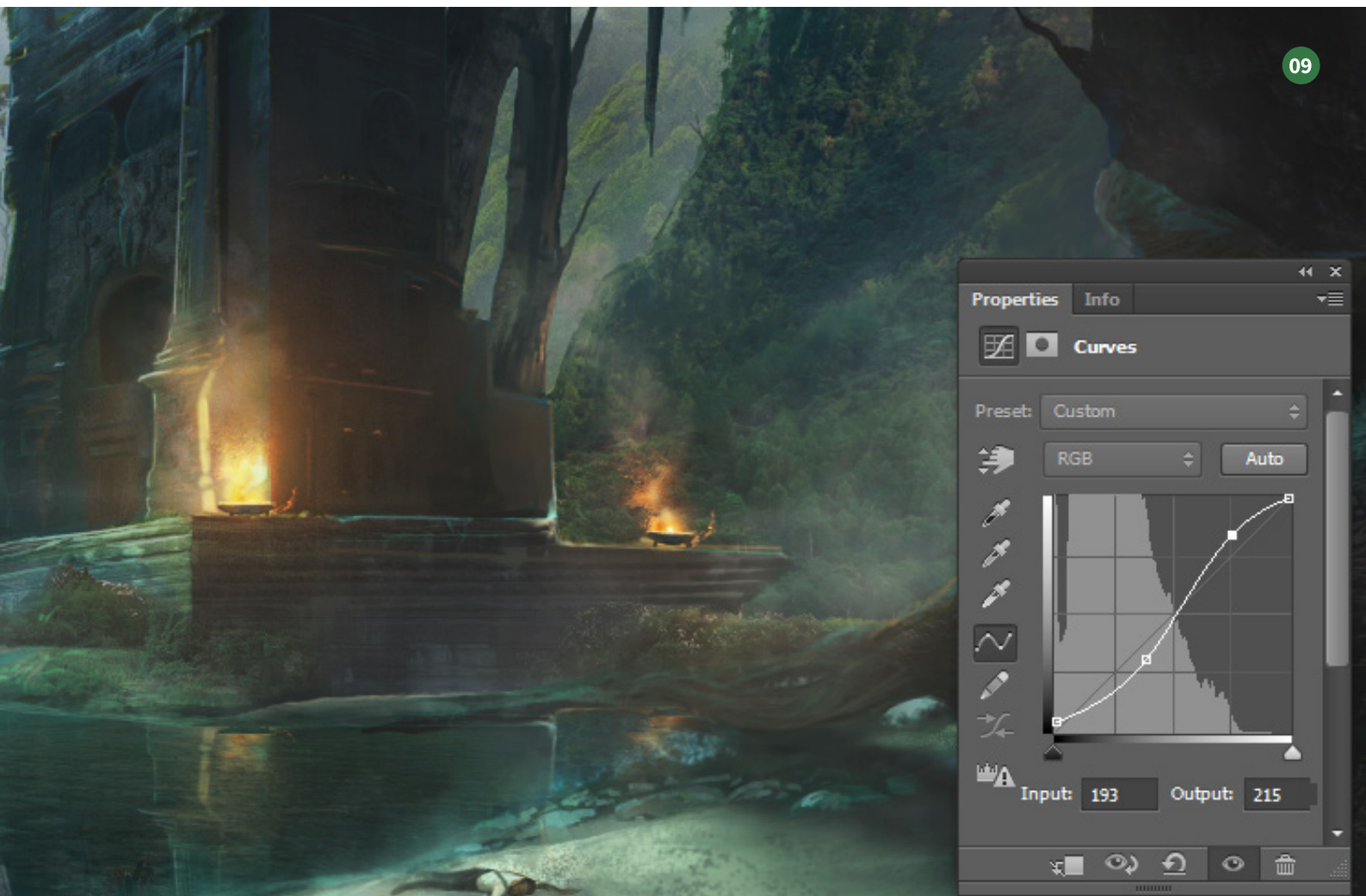


At this point the image seems a little light, so I add a Curves layer over the top and play around until I am happy with the way it looks.

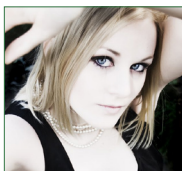
I also add a little more saturation using the Hue/Saturation sliders. ●

08 Use reference images to achieve realistic flames

09 Use image adjustments such as Curves to add the final touches



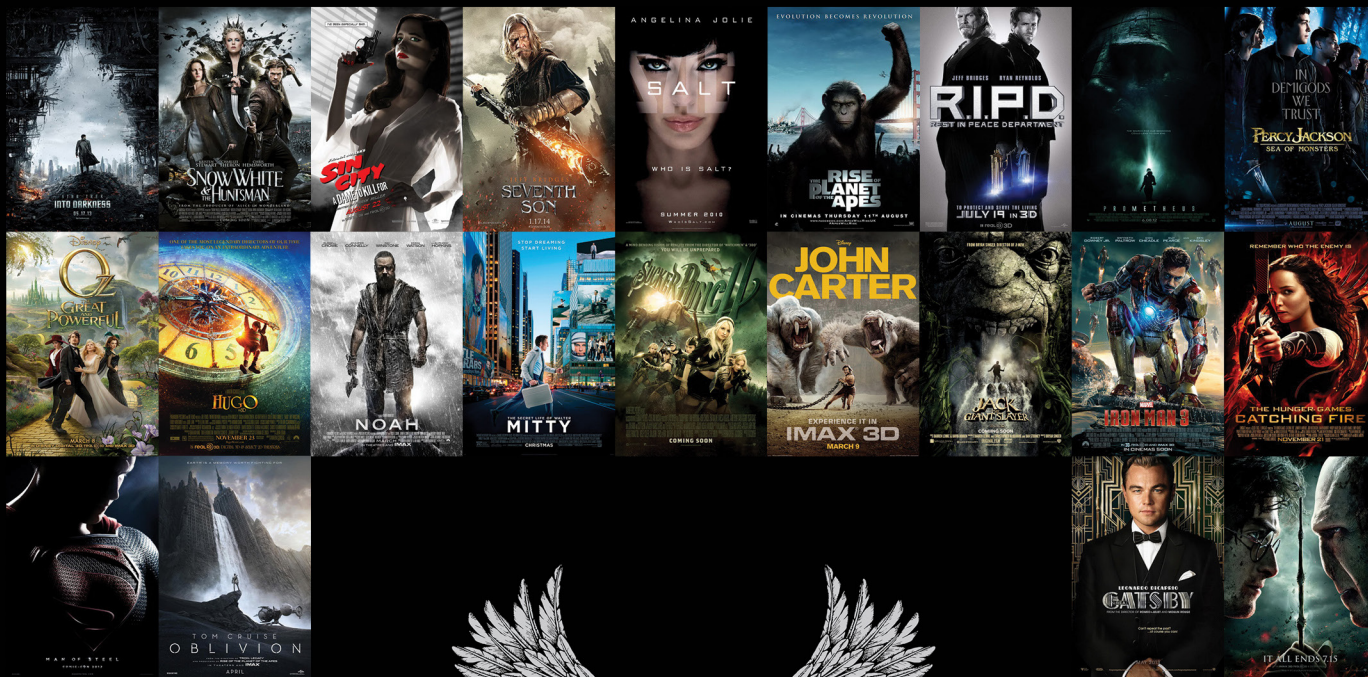
The Artist



Meg Owenson
lastsiren.com







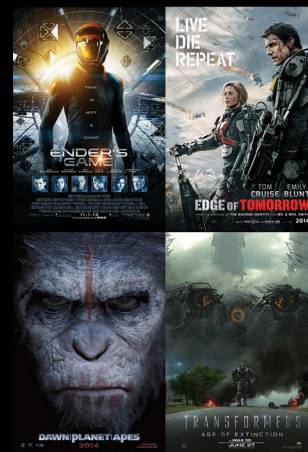
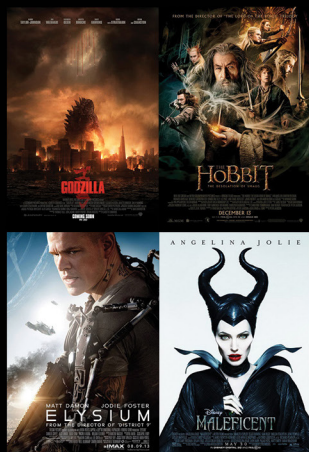
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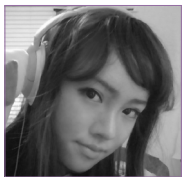


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The Artist



Emily Chen

astripedunicorn.com

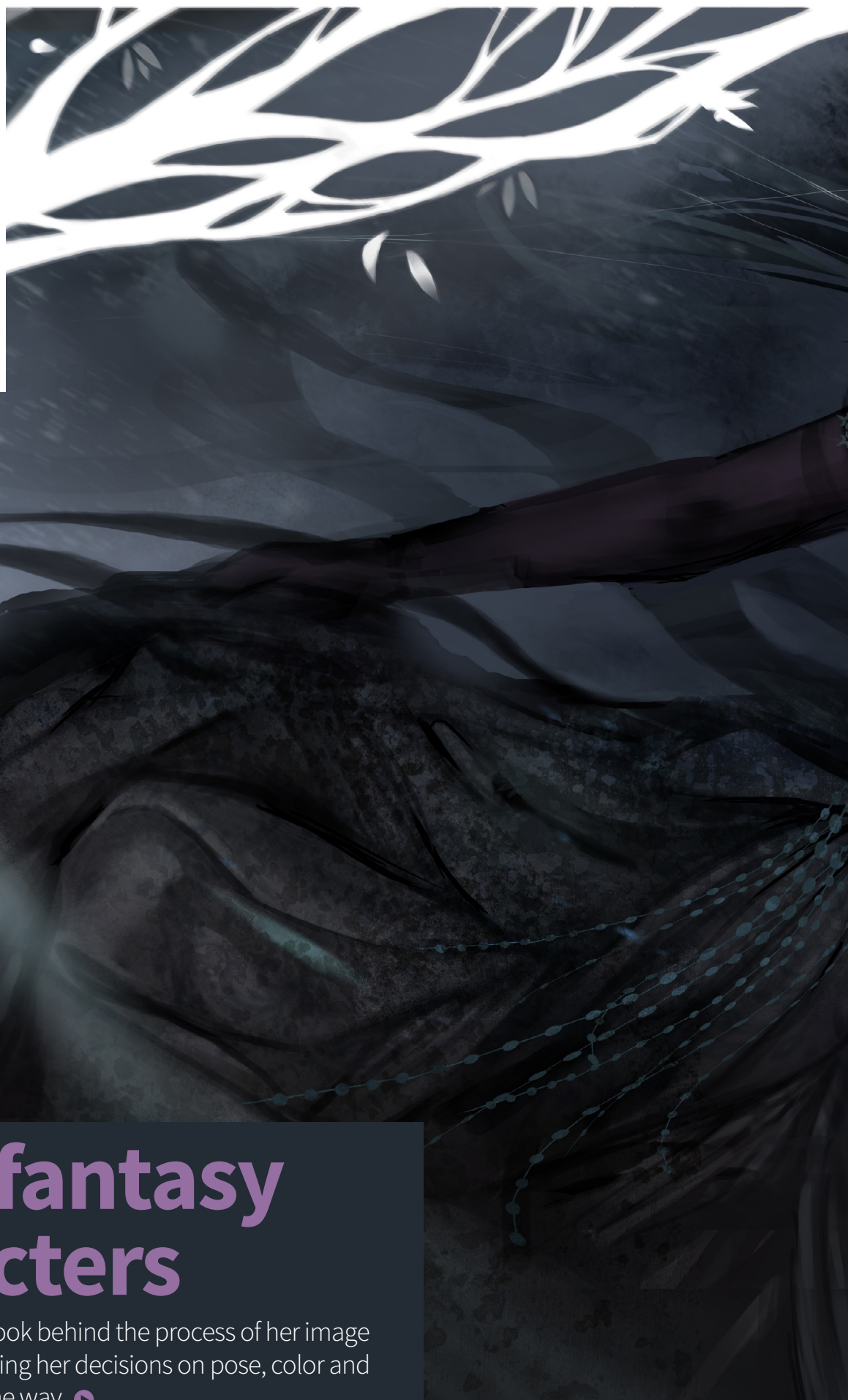
Software Used:

Photoshop

Emily Chen is a freelance illustrator and concept artist in the entertainment industry. Currently, she is studying character animation at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Paint fantasy characters

Emily Chen reveals a look behind the process of her image *A Striped Unicorn*, sharing her decisions on pose, color and compositions along the way ▶





Discover top techniques for painting dynamic fantasy characters in Photoshop...

In this tutorial, I will go through the process of creating my image, *A Striped Unicorn* from start to finish. I will explain how I go about making decisions for pose, color, and composition. We will also look at finding interesting shapes, and designing a cool border/frame for a painting.

Before I start an image, I always like to think about the mood/emotional impact that the piece will have. Often, I do this by creating a playlist of songs that have a similar sound. For example, if I am doing an upbeat and happy painting, I will often listen to country music.

If I want my painting to have lots of energy, I will listen to electronic/techno remixes. For this piece in particular, I listened to a combination of classical and slow vocal music. Being able to express your idea in every way possible before you start is really helpful and will save you a lot of time down the road. So if music helps you visualize, I suggest you try it out!

I began this image with the idea of a character being lifted out of the image by a paintbrush. Although at first the idea was a bit rough, I learned a lot in the process of trying to flesh out the concept. While painting, I ended up changing my mind quite a bit.

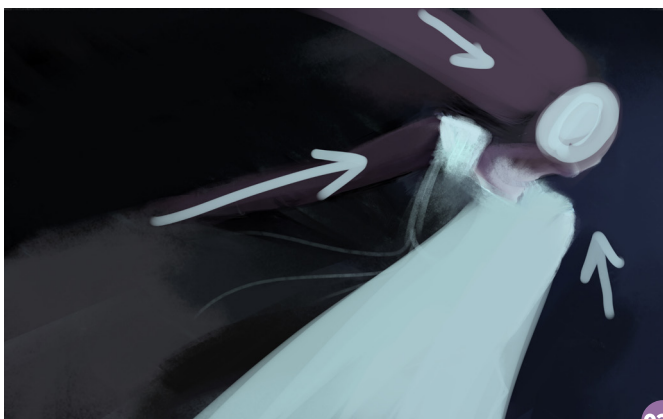
But because this was a personal piece rather than a commercial project, I was able to have fun exploring more than usual. It is really great when an illustration is able to have a life of its own, even if it is not exactly what was expected in the beginning. Sometimes it is best not to fight it – but rather work with it to develop something that is much more magical and exciting than the initial vision.



01

01 Thumbnail: Creating small sketches is an essential part of good planning. In this phase it is important to focus on the main shapes and not get caught up in details. Additionally, it is best to do them in black-and-white, for the sake of simplicity. I usually work in my sketchbook to avoid being able to zoom in and waste time rendering. The main point of thumbnailing is to

try to get a strong focal point. This stage is all about good design. Also, make sure you explore different possibilities – I suggest at least three thumbnails, but the more the better. I once had a professor that assigned us to do 55 thumbnail paintings of eggs in a day. Not surprisingly, the ideas I generated later on were much more creative and interesting than the first one.



02a



02b

02 Block in values/composition: Once you have a thumbnail picked out, it is then time to start figuring out the main values. For this painting I opted for a light character/focal point against a dark background. The dark background allowed me to control where I wanted the viewer to look by making the points of interest lighter in value.

In addition, the main light source was coming from the right, so I wanted to make sure that it stayed consistent throughout the image, in order to maintain a sense of weight and structure. Because I wanted the image to have motion and dynamism, the composition was not balanced, and most of the interest shifts towards the right.

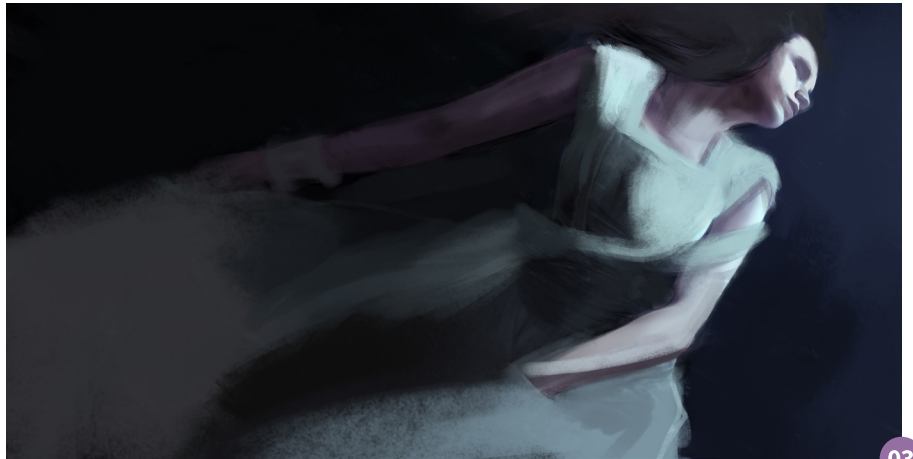
Also, I put in a lot of diagonals and avoided static horizontals to further push the unbalance. And lastly, to strengthen the focal point even more, there were many lines that served as arrows to guide the eye to the important areas of light.

03 Basic pose/gesture: Now that I had the basic values down, I could start to refine the pose. A good way to decide on a pose is to choose something that is expressive and tells a story. Attending live figure-drawing sessions helps a lot with this.

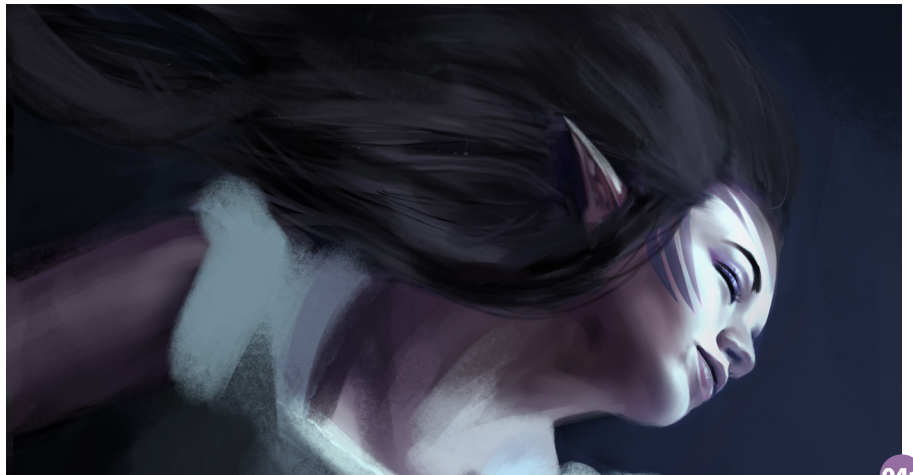
For this image I was going for a sense of motion, so I made sure the pose avoided things that looked static, such as right angles and parallel lines. It also helped to find drawing reference online for anatomy and proportion issues.

I used a Soft airbrush for the skin, and a Hard Round brush for the edges. I always have my brush opacity set to 100%. Occasionally, to add form, I would create a new layer, set it to Overlay, and paint with a black or white airbrush.

04 Face and expression: In character art the face will always be the main focal point of the artwork, so I needed to make sure that it looked good. The viewer would probably be spending most of their time in this area, so it should be one of the most detailed areas.



03



04a

I made sure I had the main structure and proportion correct before I started adding the facial markings and to refine things. I wanted the expression to be positive and peaceful, so I made her smiling with her eyes closed.

The perspective of the face was a challenge, and it took me a couple of tries to get it to look correct, but eventually I was able to settle for something that fit in with the rest of the piece. The face was not completely realistic and was a bit stylized. In my opinion, stylization is far more exciting than directly copying the model.

05 Costume: Painting cloth can be a challenge, but it is a lot easier if you understand the anatomy underneath the ►

01 These are the basic, abstract thumbnails made for this piece. Emily ended up going with the fifth option

02 This is the compositional breakdown of the piece with many diagonal lines leading to the focal point

03 This is the most basic gesture of the pose. There is not a lot of detail, but enough information to tell what is going on in the figure

04 Here is a close up of the face, achieving the main structure and perspective before adding detail



04b

clothing. At the end of the day, it's all about understanding form and light. It also helps to research the different kinds of folds and what kind of form (cylindrical, flat, and so on) causes them. Once the main structure and values were blocked in, it was time for detail and refinement.

Detailing the costume had a lot to do with fashion design and good research. In this particular case, I drew from wedding dress designs via Google images. However, I did not want the dress to be too distracting from the face, so I darkened parts to blend in with the background. I planned to paint flowing ribbons to add more dynamic lines later, in order to help guide the viewer's eye to the focal point.

06 Atmosphere and background: I started to add dust and grunge to the bottom and left areas of the image using a Cloud brush. This created a sense of depth. I also decided to add some small brushstrokes to lightly suggest snow in the background.

However, I made the snow directional for compositional reasons. This was a much better alternative to just having a black background, because it added space and made the entire thing look more three-dimensional. To add more atmosphere, I made the hair, ribbons and part of the costume fade into the background dust. Also, I blurred part of the extreme foreground for depth. As a final touch, I brightened the areas of dust that I felt were most important.

07 Color corrections: For final color corrections, I like to merge all my layers and go to Image > Adjustments > Color Balance. From there, I shift the Highlights and Midtones to the Cyan/Green/Blue side, and shift the Shadows opposite. Another option is to use the Hue/Saturation window for adjustments, but the changes are not as detailed.

You can also create a color adjustment layer and paint over the image like you are applying a wash. This allows you to directly change the colors without affecting the values. Or, if you have a reference image with an interesting color combination, you can try applying a color match to your image by going to Image > Adjustments > Match Color.

However, there are countless ways out there to play with colors in Photoshop, and I suggest you experiment and find what works best for you. Some artists are even able to paint their original image in black-and-white, and then slowly add color via these adjustments!

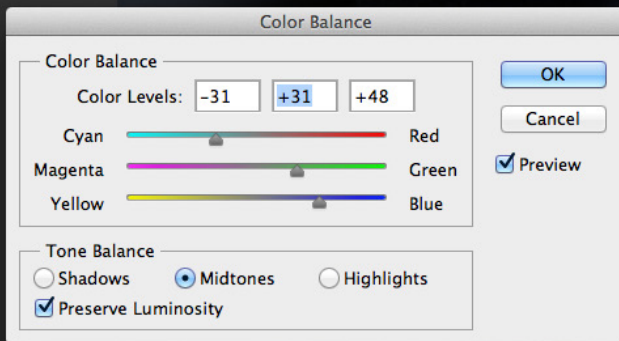


⚡ PRO TIP

Practice traditional art

Traditional art can really help you speed up the process of learning fundamentals. For example, with digital painting, there is no need for color mixing. Every color you could ever want or need is right there on the color slider. And wrong colors are easily fixable with hue/saturation adjustments. However, this prevents you from learning the theory behind colors. Taking the time to physically mix color gradients is a valuable exercise, and one of the many benefits of practicing traditional art.

Another valuable aspect of traditional art is its lack of an undo button. As digital artists, it is so easy to not think before we paint because nothing is really permanent. So, working traditionally forces us to think about every brushstroke we make. It allows us to be more aware of our decision making. Coincidentally, this also works the other way around – traditional artists can use digital as a way to loosen up and not worry as much. In the end, it is all about finding the right balance.



07a

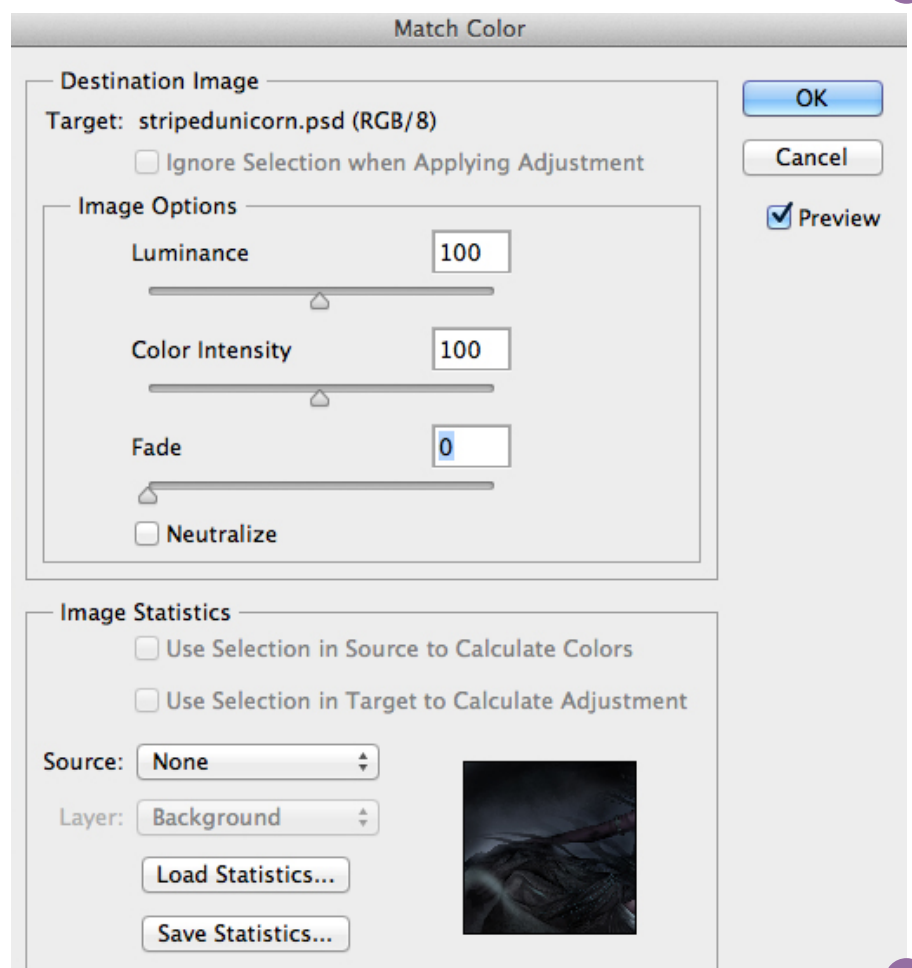
“In my opinion, stylization is far more exciting than directly copying the model”

08 Final details: The detailing part of the process is probably the slowest part of the image. It is very time consuming, so it helps to know what parts need detail and what parts do not. For this painting the most detailed areas were in the light, and the darker parts were less refined. I started by adding the flowers to the hair and small jewelry. I also added hair strands to make it look more realistic. ▶

05 Sometimes it is good to vary the materials in the costume to create interest. For example, the shoulders have fur while the lower areas of the dress are very smooth

06 This step was right before adding the snow. Although mist was put in the background, you can already see the difference it is making atmospherically

07 Here is what the color balance window looked like while adjusting the colors for this image



07b



08



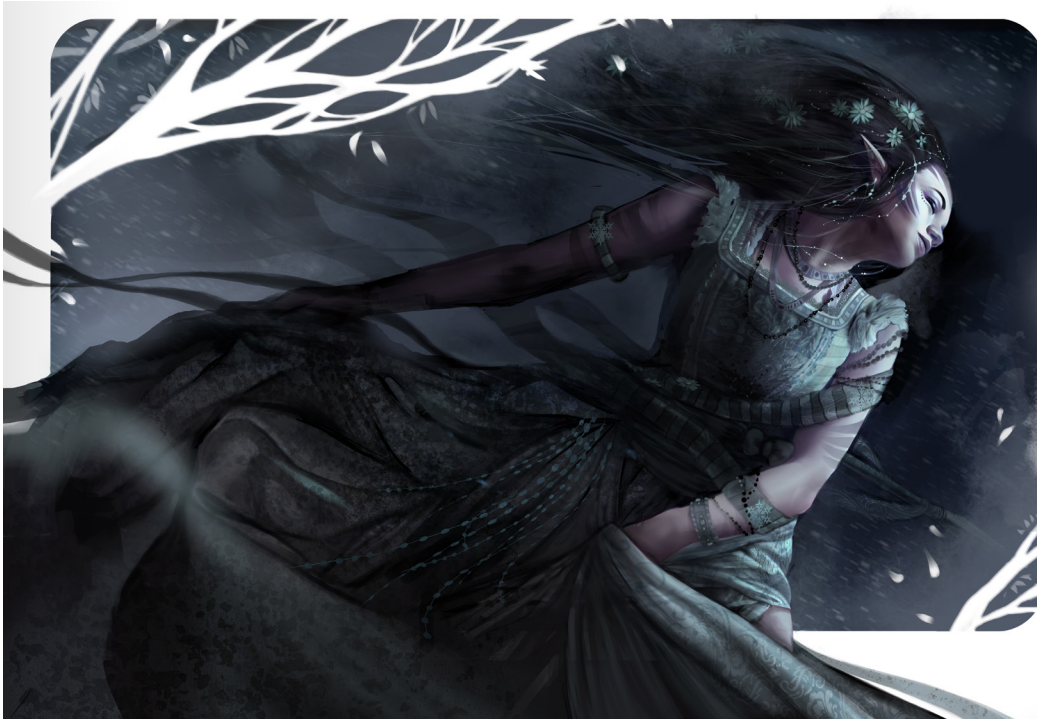
09a

Be careful not to over-detail though; if there is too much detail in the wrong area, it could make the painting look gaudy or hard to read. In this step, I found myself zooming in a lot and creating fewer new layers. In addition, I tended to stick to smaller brush sizes.

09 **Designing the border:** Creating the border design for this painting was probably the most challenging part of this piece.

It helped a lot to look online for examples of how borders are used in artwork, and I decided to

go for rounded edges in order to create a more digital/modern look. I also added tree branches in order to integrate the white border into the image more. However, the branches are stylized; they are rounded so that the shapes are not too disturbing or jarring.



09b



10

Afterwards, I added white petals to create more motion to the image and make the border seem like a part of the painting itself. I wanted to make sure that the border was a part of the painting rather than just a picture frame. Also, I knew that I was going to add a paintbrush on the right of the image, so I added more space using the Crop tool.

10 The paintbrush and horn: The final step was to add the paintbrush and horn. First, I painted the calligraphy brush, and made sure to add a cast shadow so it looked like it was in space. It still seemed a bit out of place, so in order to make it look more intentional, I added a unicorn horn because it creates fun shapes.

In addition, I added watercolor-like brushstrokes to the right side of the image. This was done using a set of splatter brushes. The bottom-right side of the image still seemed empty, so all I had to do was add a mark/signature for compositional reasons and I was done! ●

⚡ PRO TIP

Overcoming an art block

One of the most common questions I get asked is how to overcome an 'art block.' Personally, whenever I feel that I am creatively drained, I try to do something completely new. For example, if you are a character artist, try painting an environment for a change. It may also be fun to try out new tools such as 3D. You could even switch mediums for a while and learn how to animate! In my opinion, an art block happens when you are not having fun. So, the best way to fight it is to create interest and joy in the art-making process. There is also much to be said about simply pushing forward with grit and determination. Remember - you will get through this!

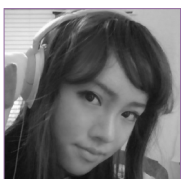
08 Although detailing can be tedious, it really makes a huge difference!

09 The rounded edges made a really big difference in integrating the painting with its border

10 The process of adding in the paintbrush and water color marks



The Artist



Emily Chen
astripedunicorn.com



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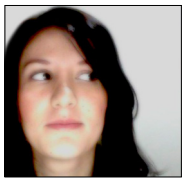
beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop® characters

Following on from the highly successful *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop*, this latest title explores the popular techniques used in character design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting: Characters is a comprehensive guide for artists wishing to create convincing and detailed characters. It features established artists such as Charlie Bowater (concept artist at Atomhawk) and Derek Stenning (freelance concept artist and illustrator, with clients including Marvel Entertainment and Nintendo) who share their industry experiences by covering such aspects as posing characters, choosing the correct costumes, conveying emotions, and creating suitable moods.

Comprehensive step-by-step instructions – plus a quick tips section demonstrating how to paint elements that are integral to character design and a glossary covering essential Photoshop tools – make this an invaluable resource for those looking to learn new skills, as well as those pursuing the next level.

The Artist



Sandra Posada

artstation.com/artist/sandraposada944

Software Used:

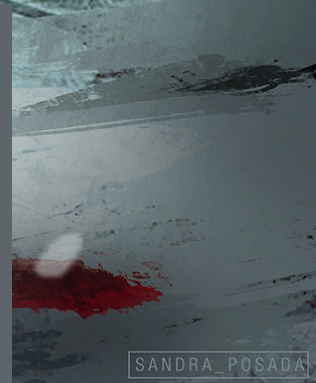
Photoshop

Sandra Posada is from Medellin, Colombia and for three years she has been a freelance conceptual artist and illustrator specializing in character design. Sandra has worked on different projects for graphic novels and comics. Currently, she is working on her portfolio which will allow her to learn and practice the foundations of art and develop high quality images.



Create tattooed warriors

Sandra Posada shares the creative workflow behind her image, *Japanese Woman*. Sandra divulges useful tips and tricks for conceiving striking fantasy characters in the following step-by-step tutorial [▶](#)



SANDRA POSADA

Discover techniques to paint your own female warrior...

My starting point for this tutorial was to create a fierce and independent female character, with a balance between beauty, intelligence and cunning.

For this, I researched the Japanese culture, warriors and the role of women in this topic. After some reading on the subject, I found the 'onna-bugeisha', a kind of warrior that belongs to the Japanese upper class. Many wives, widows, daughters, and rebels answered the call of duty to participate in the battle, usually with the Samurai men. This is exactly what I want to create, but completely avoiding the typical armor.

01 Concept sketch: Once I had the brief, I decided to start sketching some ideas based on my research. My main goal for this piece was to highlight the character with the design of the costume – a tight fitting and bold costume – therefore I worked in previous silhouettes to find the character that I want.

When I chose the one I liked, I defined the size of my canvas. I recommend working with a minimum size of 2,000 pixels to 300dpi, as this helps to assure an appropriate amount of detail that is shown in the final image.

02 Planning the composition: It was time to define the position by making some thumbnails to look at my idea, until I found the one that I liked the most. In this case, it was not



⚡ PRO TIP

Research is very important

Your designs will only be as good as what you know, so for that reason it is important that before starting an illustration, you must investigate everything you need – this allows you to get a more realistic result, and when you start to work, it will be much easier.

so hard due to the fact I had a clear idea in mind and a defiant attitude.

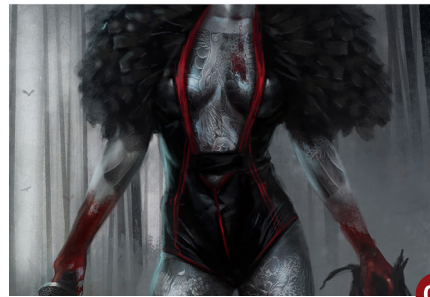
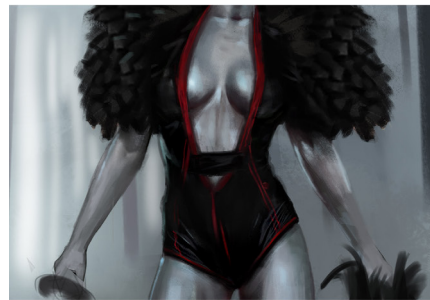
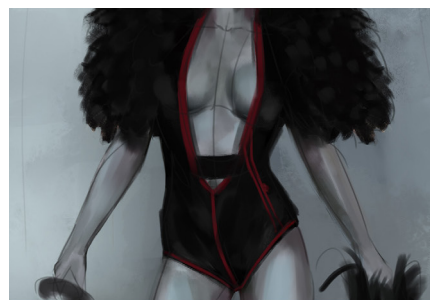
After I had worked on the general idea, I had to think about the composition of all the different

01 Using silhouettes to figure out the concept

02 Sketching out thumbnails to visualize the best composition



02



04

⚡ PRO TIP

Volume

With the volume we create an illusion of depth, therefore the shadows, lights and reflections are so important to get a 3D figure in a flat drawing.

elements of the image, as well as the character, background and supports.

03 Preparing the base: Once I had a clear sketch, on another layer underneath, I began to add some strokes with a brush with a little texture to help me later; I added some lighting effects, keeping it soft and without many details. I chose desaturated colors to obtain contrasts later. When I had the basic structure of the body and costume, I started to add color; in this case my color range was very simple.

04 Building up the detail: In another layer on top I added details, such as the folds of the outfit, the volume of the shoulders and some little points of light that show the tight stocking on the legs. ▶



05



I then added some blood in different parts of the body – red suggests anger, action and danger, all the qualities that I wanted to show to the viewer; in addition it helped to reinforce an atmosphere of battle.

06 Adding atmosphere: Throughout these steps I constantly jumped all over the place in the drawing, and I gradually started to refine it. I used a mix between the Blur filters, the Smudge tool and the Soft brush to integrate the character with the environment and create some more depth.

07 Last piece of the painting: I did not want my character to be too generic, so I decided to add tattoos (Oukoshisei/Irezumi), which originally in Japanese culture meant something spiritual and denoted social status. I used some photos of tattoos that I had already carefully chosen, then I changed the blending mode to Soft Light and added noise.

For the background, I searched images about cold forests. I put one in the background and applied a little bit of blur and atmosphere, next erasing where necessary.

08 Finishing touches: As the final stages of painting are to add all the details that complement the work, I readjusted the general light and color, and I darkened the image

edges on the right side, accentuating a slightly more dramatic lighting. I used the Lighten tool to make certain areas stand out and create volume. Finally I added a fog effect to add atmosphere. Dust in the air is always a nice addition because it creates a fairytale atmosphere.

I made a copy of all visible layers and flattened them. I added a sharpening effect to accentuate more details, and I used the Lens Correction tool to mimic photographic effects like noise, distortion and chromatic aberration. ●

03 Blocking in the base colors and lighting scheme

04 Painting in the finer details of the costume

05 Blending in the skin tone and adding accents of red

06 Making use of Photoshop filters and tools to add atmosphere

07 Using photos in Soft Light mode to add the tattoos and transform them to fit the body

08 Making final adjustments to make the image pop

When you have the details on a different layer, it makes it easier to modify them. It's important to keep in mind the different reactions to light when you are simulating different materials; for instance the skin, the kind of fabric, the steel, all of them react in a specific way.

05 Refine: I like to spend a lot of time on the skin hues. For this, I applied blue, violet and red hues to create a warmer and brighter aspect, giving the skin different volumes generated by the main light source, and keeping the chromatic consistency of the drawing.

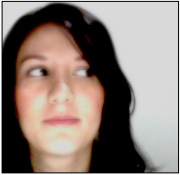


07



08

The Artist



Sandra Posada

artstation.com/artist/sandraposada944





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Eric Spray

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Software Used:

Photoshop Elements

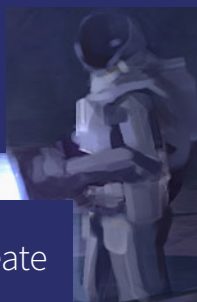
Eric Spray studied at the Columbus College of Art and design before accepting a position at Raven Software in 2007. At Raven, Eric is a concept artist and environment art director specializing in environment, character, and prop design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop Elements:

Speed Painting

by Eric Spray

Discover the process Eric Spray uses in Photoshop Elements to create a speed-painting of an exterior environment ▶





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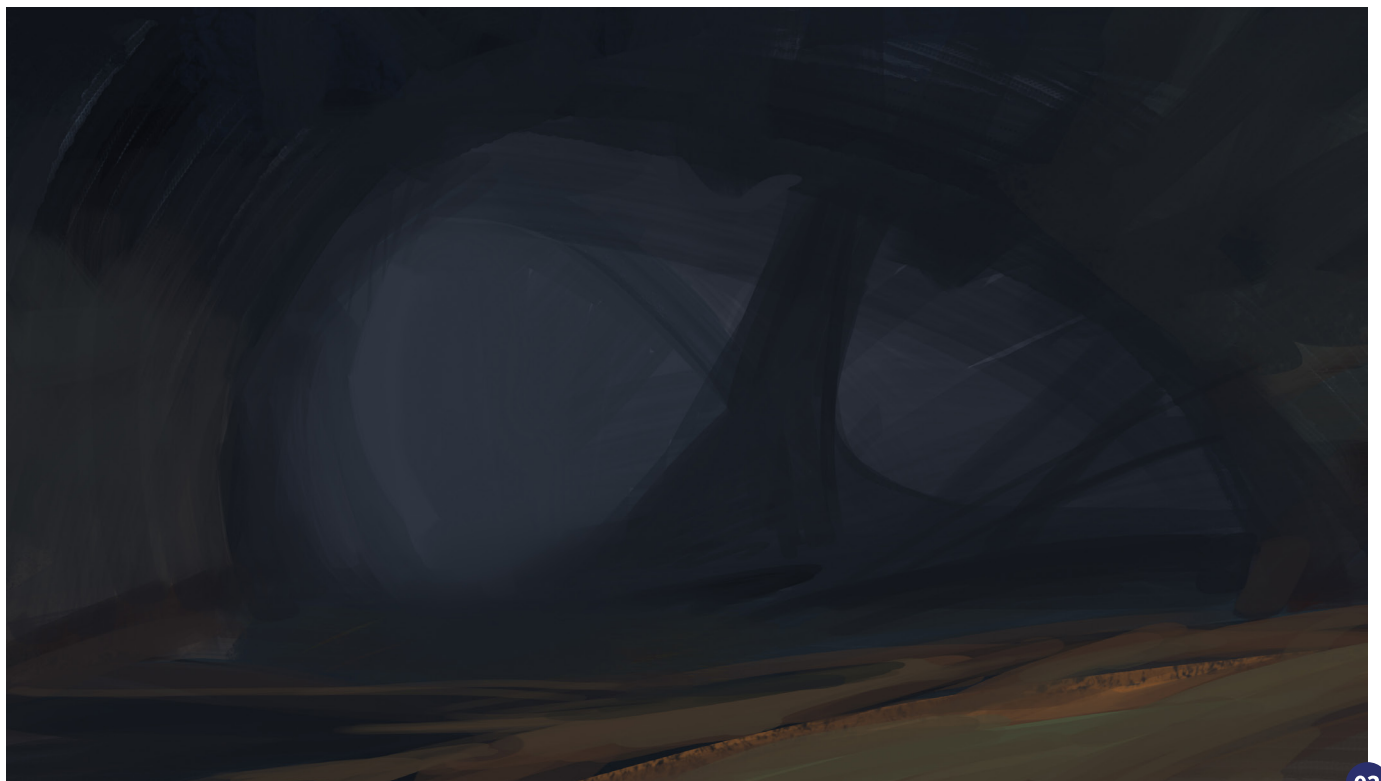
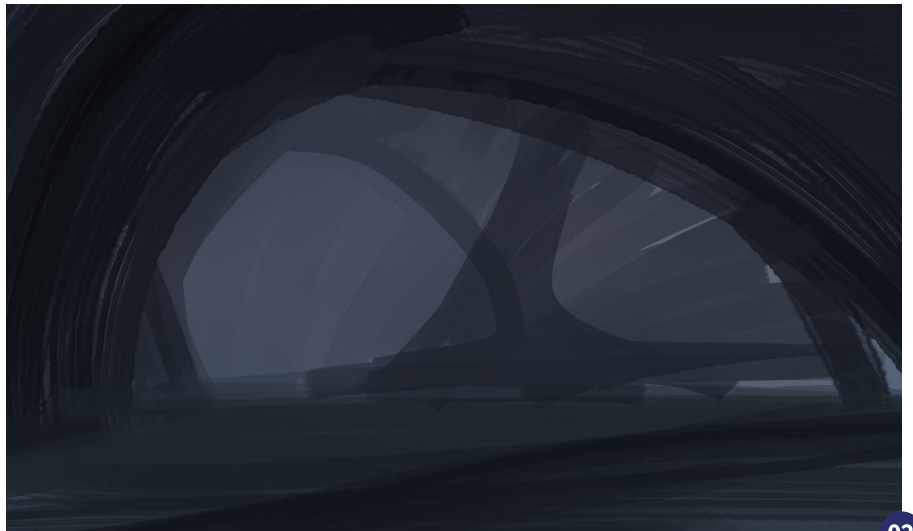
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For this tutorial I'll be using Photoshop Elements to create a speed-painting of an exterior environment. Compared to traditional media, digital painting is very fast and efficient – there is virtually no preparation time and no waiting for paint to dry, no mixing paint. For those who are starting digital painting with a background in traditional art, this will become more apparent after a few weeks of practice. Photoshop Elements provides a ton of tools and resources that will speed up the painting process as well.

First, for those of you who are just beginning your journey into digital art, speed-painting isn't about how fast you can paint. Speed and efficiency will come with practice. If you rush the painting process, or neglect the basics of design (composition, proportion, and so on), your painting will suffer in the end. What's most important is to enjoy the time spent painting and not think of it as a race.

Before I start any speed-painting I make sure I do a little bit of reference gathering. Even with a fantasy-based painting I still want to pull ideas from real-world references. What you think you see in your head can only take you so far, and you may come to a point where you need some visual aid to help resolve part of the painting. This can cause unnecessary frustration that can be easily solved by a quick online image search.

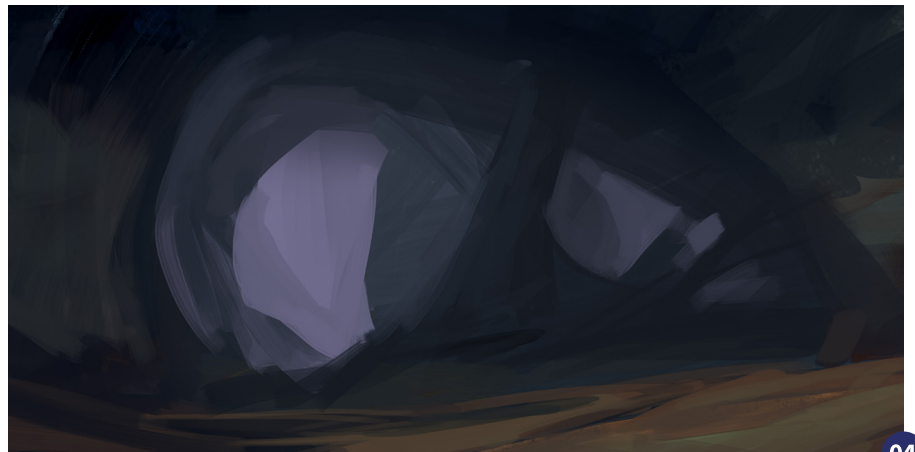


01 Starting out: Before starting this particular painting I decide to give myself a general theme. I really enjoy other-worldly landscapes with explorers wandering about. You have to paint things you're passionate about if you want to be motivated to paint. I love the sci-fi horror genre so naturally I'm going to paint images of that type. I'll walk through my process in a series of 29 images explaining the steps to reach the final scene. I have a few tricks for speed-painting in Elements that I will discuss in full as well.

First, I create a new file and set the editing mode to Expert. This mode gives you features like layers and the necessary tools tab that you'll use to actually paint. With the file open, the first thing I do is fill the white space. I hate looking at a white void – eventually all the space will be filled up, so the Paint Bucket tool is immediately used to address this.

My thinking is a dark interior setting, so I choose a mid-dark, neutral color for the fill. Generally I will start with a mid-value tone and introduce lighter and darker tones from there. Be cautious of your blacks though, as 100-percent black gives you nowhere to go.

02 First marks: With the page filled, I feel comfortable starting to sketch out the composition. Keeping my brushstrokes loose and the brush size large, I want to lay down my broadest strokes first to quickly block out the scene. I lay in basic shapes as a foundation, with the intent of bringing in development details later, and generally focus on how I want the eye to move across the page – that's the mentality I always lead with.



04

03 Massing shapes: Personally, I like to think in terms of volumes, not lines, when it comes to speed-painting.

Up to this point, I have not introduced any textural or abstract brushes. I have a default set of brushes (both custom and standard) that I like to use that make it feel more like traditional painting.

04 Adding light: I am happy with the shapes I massed out, so I move on to pushing and pulling the lights and darks in the image. I also want to introduce a primary light source. I'm going for dark and ominous so I restrain myself from going too bold with the lights at first – I'll refine the light setup later.

When I started this painting, I knew I wanted the image to have a kind of grim blue/purple tonality. My personal art tends to be much more stylized and color-amped than the paintings I create at work. I'm not shy when it comes to color, though; usually I find myself having to pull it back.

05 Adjustment layers: When it comes to adjustment layers I don't have a specific point during the painting process where I use them. In this instance, I just want to deepen the darks and push the color a bit more.

I use Soft Light layers more than any of the other adjustment layers. It has a really subtle effect – almost like a soft glaze that won't radically alter ▶

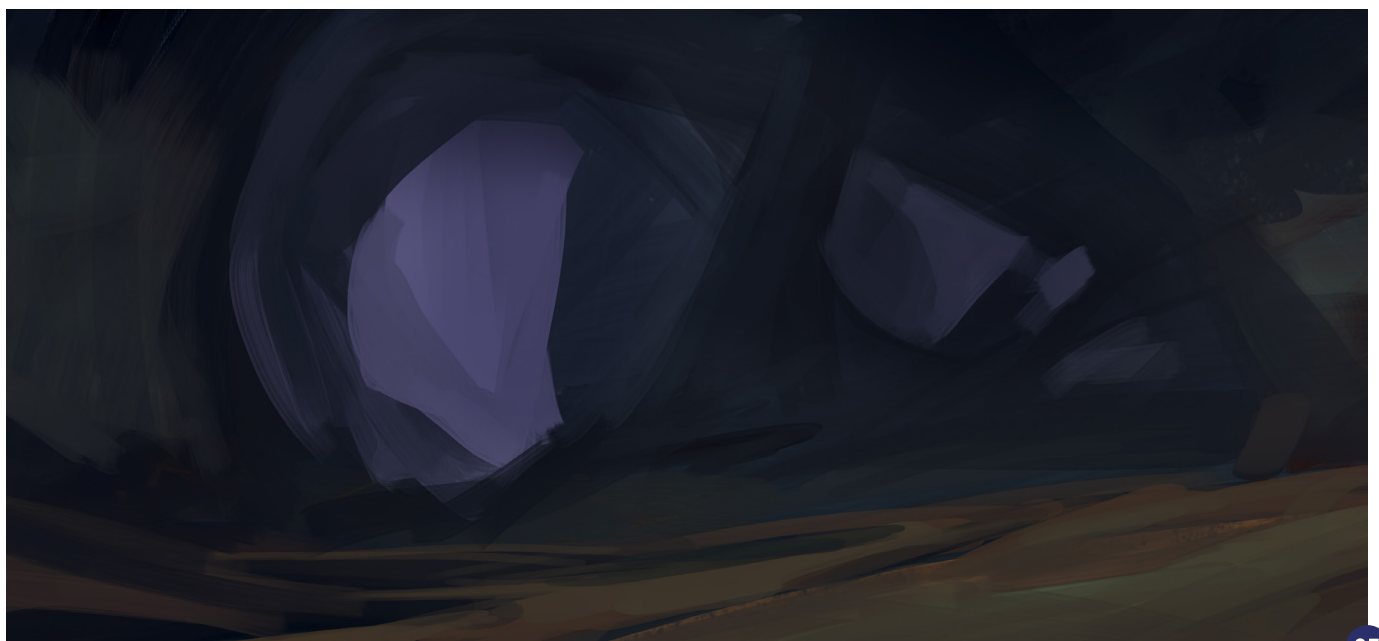
01 Filling the void with an appropriate color

02 Making the first shapes on the canvas to define the composition

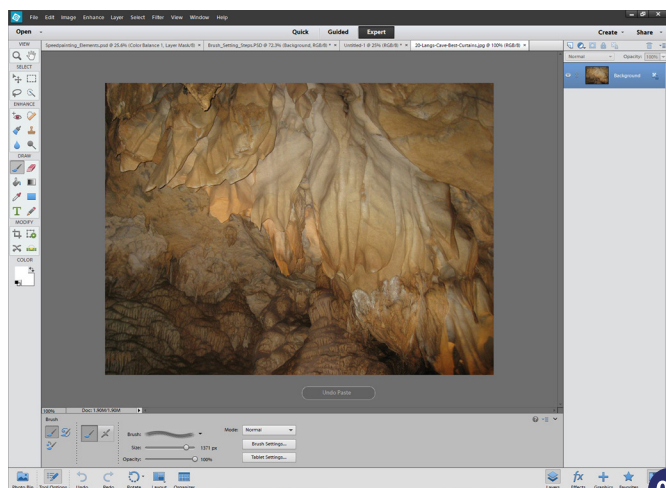
03 Adding a little color and adding volume to shapes

04 Adding light and shadow to the scene

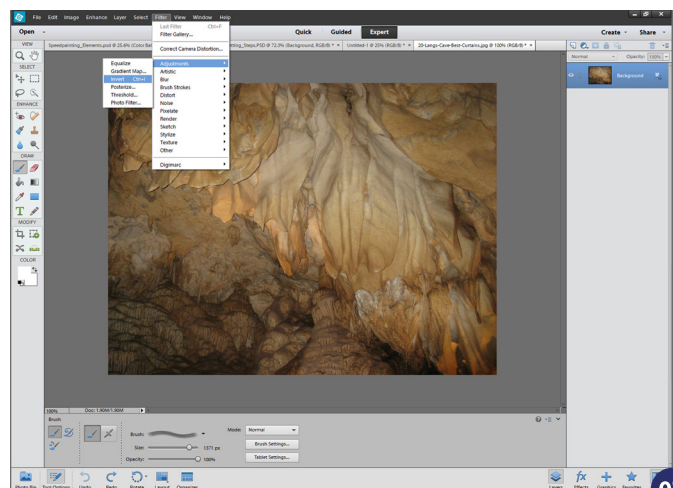
05 Using adjustment layers to add subtle changes to the atmosphere



05



06



07

your image like Hard Light or Vivid Light will do. I recommend that you experiment and use the adjustment styles, but try not to abuse them if you can help it. You might be overusing them if you have more adjustment style layers than you do painted layers.

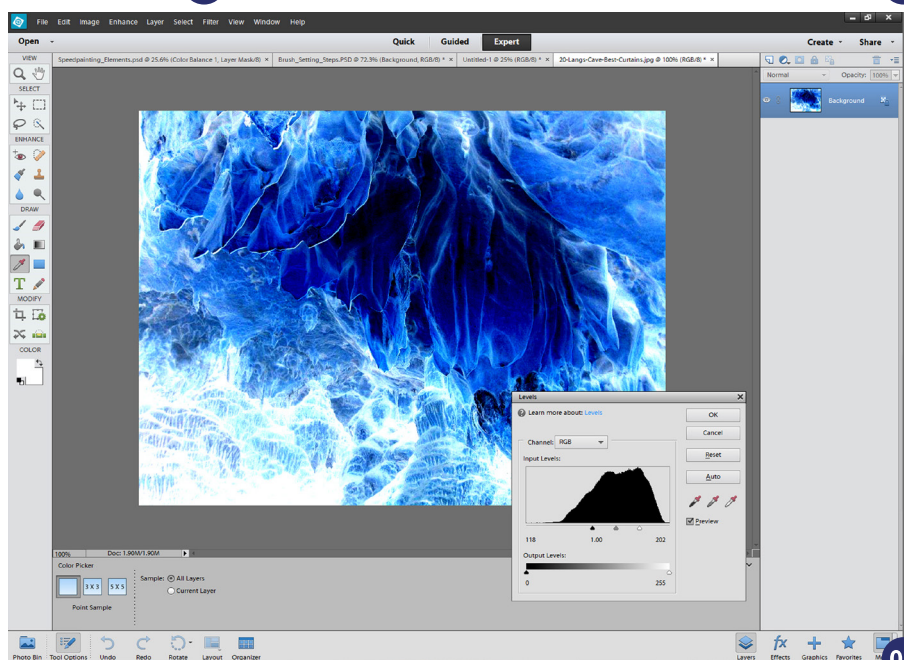
06 Brushes: Next, I move into the complex brush sets. These are based on real-world references I've found. I went into the painting knowing I wanted to paint a cave, so naturally I found some cool cave references. I looked for images of caves that were a bit more bizarre and unusual – less typical of what a standard cave looks like in my mind. One particular cave reference I found had an almost fungal quality. I liked how the shapes were more amorphous than chiseled and sharp, and it inspired quite a few ideas for my painting.

07 Creating a brush: I want to create a brush from the references I've gathered, so the first thing I do is create a new file. I tend not to create brushes on top of the painting I'm working on, simply for cleanliness.

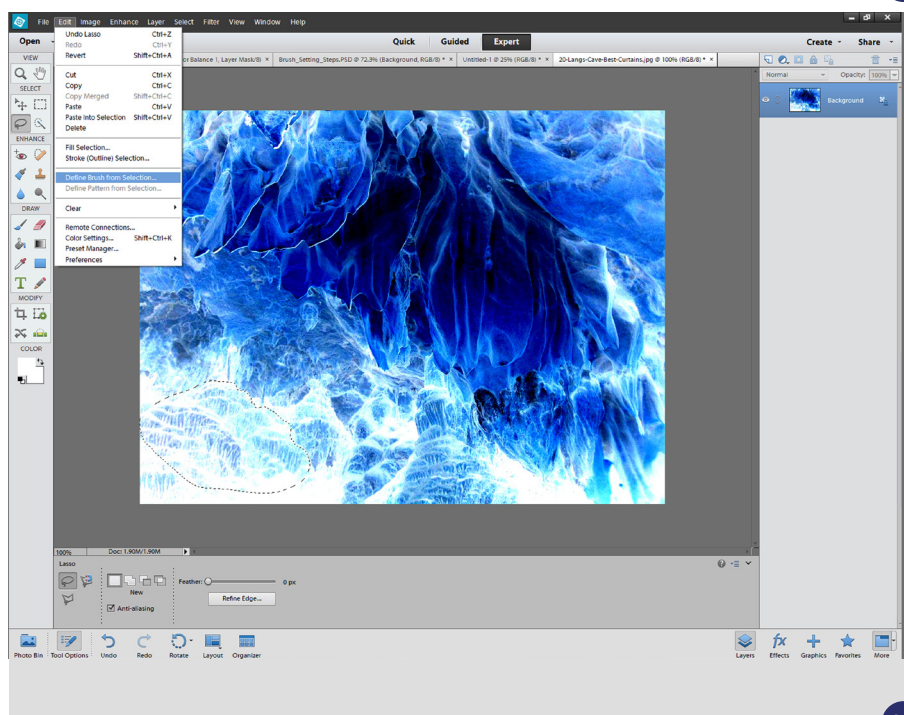
So after setting up a new canvas, I open up my chosen reference image and then copy and paste the entire image onto a blank canvas in Photoshop Elements.

After reviewing the image and defining the shapes that stand out to me, I need to invert the areas I want to turn into a brush. To do this I go to Filter > Adjustments > Invert, as seen in image 07, or I use the shortcut Ctrl+I. Inverting the image isn't a necessary step, and is really only appropriate in this instance.

08 Preparing the image: Then I apply a Levels adjustment. I've found the best brushes are made in a high-contrast value range: as close to black and white without being distorted. This also allows for them to be



08



09

used as special selection layers that will come in handy later. I use this technique superfluously, but to pull it off you need to have white space surrounding your dark shapes.

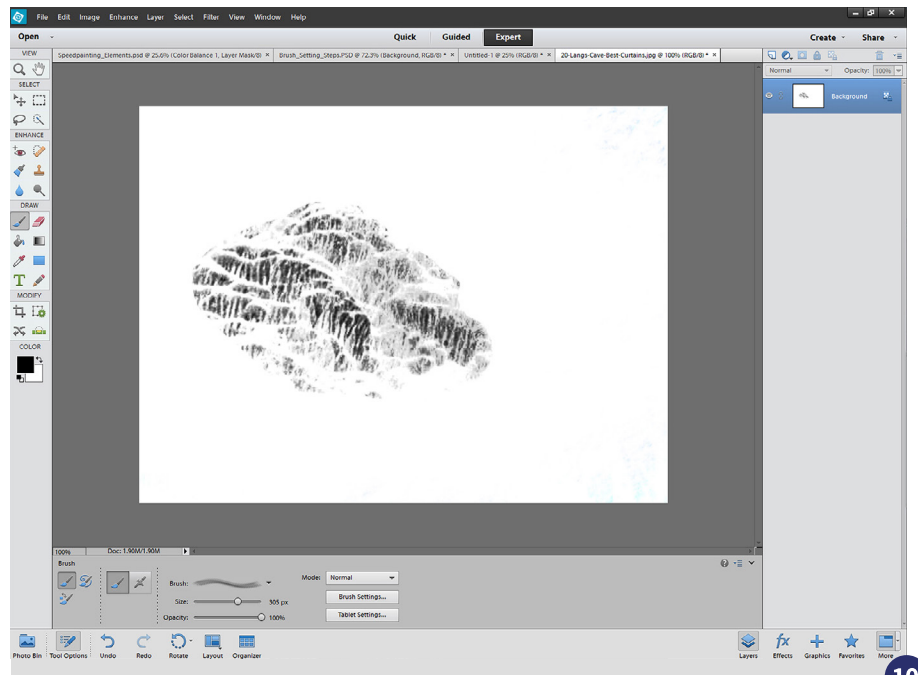
09 Selecting the texture: Next, I decide what part of the image I want to make a brush out of. I use the Lasso tool to trace around a specific section of the image, then drop down to Edit > Define Brush from the top bar.

10 Finishing the brush: After naming your brush, it will be readily available at the bottom of the Brush set. I will create dozens of custom brushes for individual paintings, but consistently use the default Basic Brushes throughout, as well.

I almost always apply brush settings to new brushes I create. Fade, Spacing, and Roundness are the ones I usually play with. For bigger, more complex brushes I like to set the Spacing to be very wide, so when I paint it lays down more like a stencil. Also, Fade is a useful brush setting for ghosting brushstrokes into the background.

11 Using the custom brush: So going back to the speed-painting, I create a new layer where I start introducing the new brushes. I lay down only a few strokes, which I then distort using the Transform tool. I use it to stretch the shape into a position to my liking. If you made your brush with white space around it, as a clean stencil shape, you can make a selection that perfectly outlines the contour of the shape by holding Ctrl and left-clicking on the boxed preview window of the layer in the Layers tab.

From the selection I just made, I am now free to paint only within that shape. I use a very large

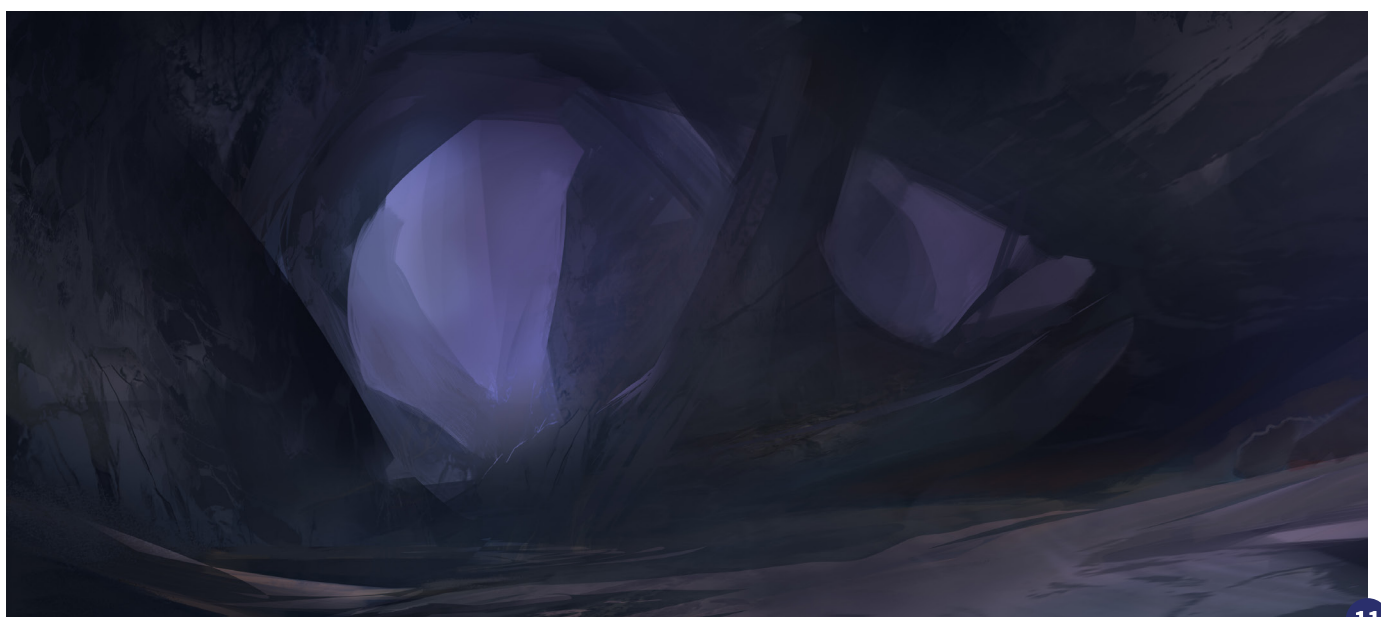


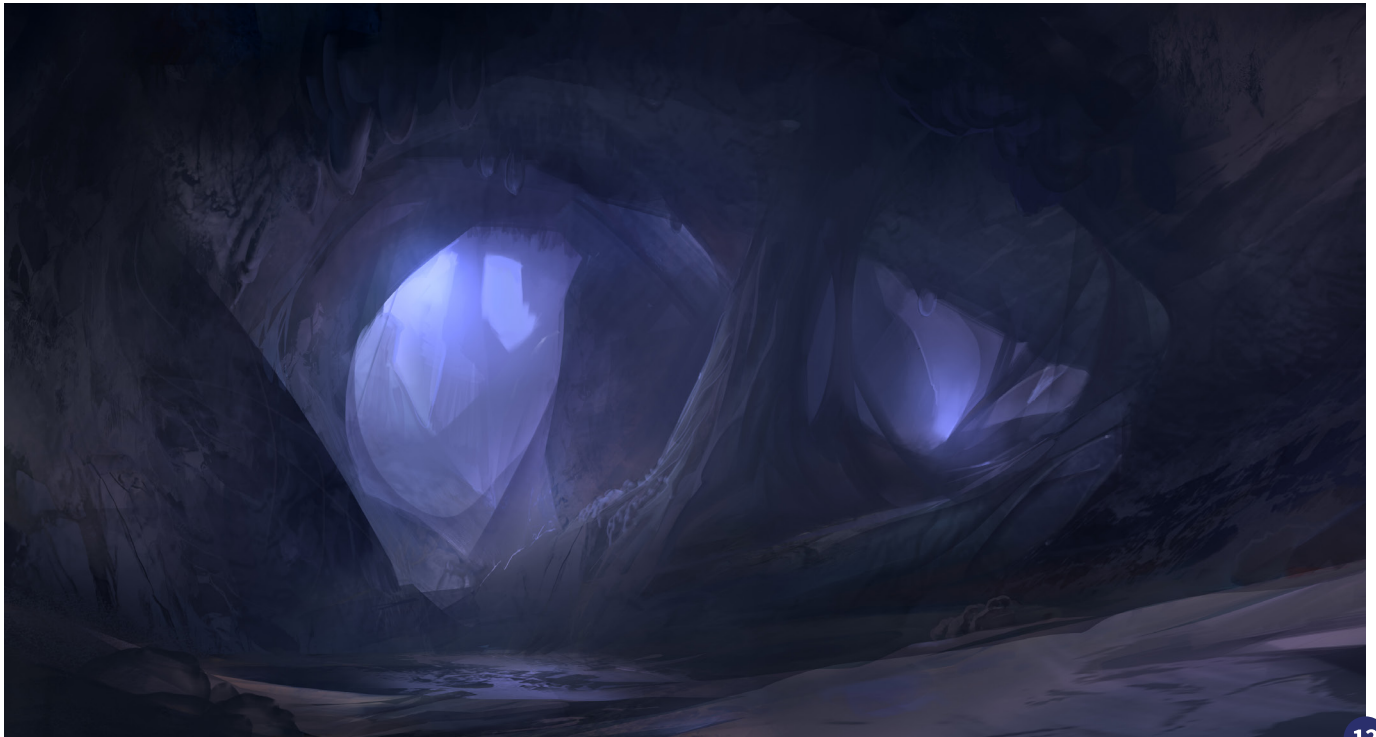
brush to mark within the shape to introduce a bit more textural character as well. It also camouflages the stencil aspect a bit.

12 Adding highlights: The painting is very mid-value still, so I use a large, soft-edged brush to pull out some lights. I set the Brush mode to Color Dodge – a very fast way to brighten up a scene. Be conscious of the color swatch you're painting with, though – the closer the value is to white the more drastic the Dodge effect will be. To control the effect I choose a color in a very dark range. From here I continue to employ the same techniques over and over again to build up the painting.

In Photoshop Elements you can even save selections you've made to be loaded up later ▶

- 06** Finding cave references to create a custom brush
- 07** Preparing sections of the image before making a custom brush
- 08** Giving the image a stark contrast to make a crisp brush
- 09** Using the Lasso tool to select the area needed
- 10** Applying Brush settings and naming the brush will finish the custom brush process
- 11** Making marks with the custom brushes you have just made





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when you need them. Once you have a selection made, go to the Selection tab and choose Save Selection. Next time you need it just go to the same tab and choose Load Selection.

13 Flipping the image: Another good trick you could use to help give you a fresh eye on your painting is to flip the canvas horizontally. With traditional media, you have to go old school and hold up a mirror to view the flipped image, but with Photoshop Elements it's super convenient to be able to work on the painting from both of the orientations.

14 Adding more highlights: I saved out a layer selection earlier, which I decide to use to erase out some parts of the reflection and add a little more high-frequency detail. I then follow this with another layer of Brush dodging to 'pop' even more light.

At this point I also realize that I need to re-evaluate the composition again.

15 Characters: It's now time to introduce some figures into the scene. Up to this point, I have kept the composition a bit on the simple side, knowing that characters and other subjects might be introduced later. I wanted to make sure they reinforced the composition of the image and were not just dropped haphazardly into the image.

I outline my ideas for the design in red. I set up a hierarchy of character placement and size so that one could lead as the dominant figure (the focal



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figure). This is a basic principle of design – having large, medium, and small shapes creates more visual interest. In this case, they are also staged to emphasize spatial depth and distance.

16 Blocking in characters: After blocking in the figures I quickly realize that dark silhouettes against a dark environment have made it difficult to pick out the characters from the background, so I decide to give them white astronaut gear to make them pop out. This way, they look more legible from a quick read.

17 Refining the characters: After adding the characters in white, I feel confident ▶

- 12** Adding highlights using either a soft-edged brush or the Lasso tool to create selections
- 13** Flipping the image to highlight problems
- 14** Adding more detail and highlights to the image
- 15** Adding figures strategically through the piece to create depth
- 16** Making the characters stand out against the dark background
- 17** Refining the detail on the figures in the scene



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in fleshing the characters out a bit and adding a little more detail to them in general.

18 Checking the image: I don't like to finish one area of a painting and never touch it again. I enjoy seeing all the parts of the image develop together. The idea being that if I decide I don't like a part of the painting, less time will have been wasted than if I spent hours modeling sections of it.

I am still a bit unsure about the astronaut designs, so I make a mental note to revisit them later on (possibly redesign them all together). At this stage in the process though, the composition appears to be working well from both orientations.

19 Adding atmosphere: All the elements are in place, so it's a good time to start polishing some areas of the painting.

So after the flip, I start introducing some fog and atmospheric effects. I have a few brushes that are specifically designed for doing this, so it doesn't take much time at all to drop some eerie mist into the scene.

20 The foreground: Moving from the background to the foreground, I continue polishing areas around the figures. I take a peek at some of the references I had gathered to get some detailed information for fleshing out the foreground. I mentioned earlier that the cave reference had some characteristics of fungus. I



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decide to play that idea up here and aim for a wet-and-spongy ground surface.

To help push the realism a bit more I drop in a small section of a photo. When I incorporate photos, I like to use them as style guides rather than to fill the space up entirely. I will paint out and over the photo so it blends in with the rest of the painting. Painting over photos you drop in keeps the image from feeling like a photo-collage and more like a digital painting.

21 Adjusting lights: I continue pushing the lights and darks and expanding the value range up until the very end, although sometimes I have to dial back the contrast range with an adjustment layer if I push it too far.

I set my Brush tool to Dodge to quickly increase the light influence from the background. If the layer is merged, I will erase away areas near the Dodge so that shadows do not become too greatly affected.

22 Tone control: I feel that the chromatic intensity of the painting has become too intense over the course of this tutorial. The purples appear exaggerated and are inching towards the 'candy' zone.

To remedy this, I copy and paste a merged layer of the entire painting and switch it to a Soft Light layer. I apply a Levels adjustment (Ctrl+L) to the



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layer to calm the intense contrast it creates. I then make a Hue/Saturation adjustment (Ctrl+H), and by setting the Hue/Saturation mode to Colorize, I am able to choose a new tonality that will influence the atmosphere of the painting.

23 Applying Soft Light: This is almost like glazing in traditional oil painting. When I set the layer style to Soft Light, it influences the overall tonality of the painting and makes the purple seem less aggressive.

This speed-painting is interesting for me to see evolve. My focus for the first half of the painting was purely on mood, atmosphere, ►

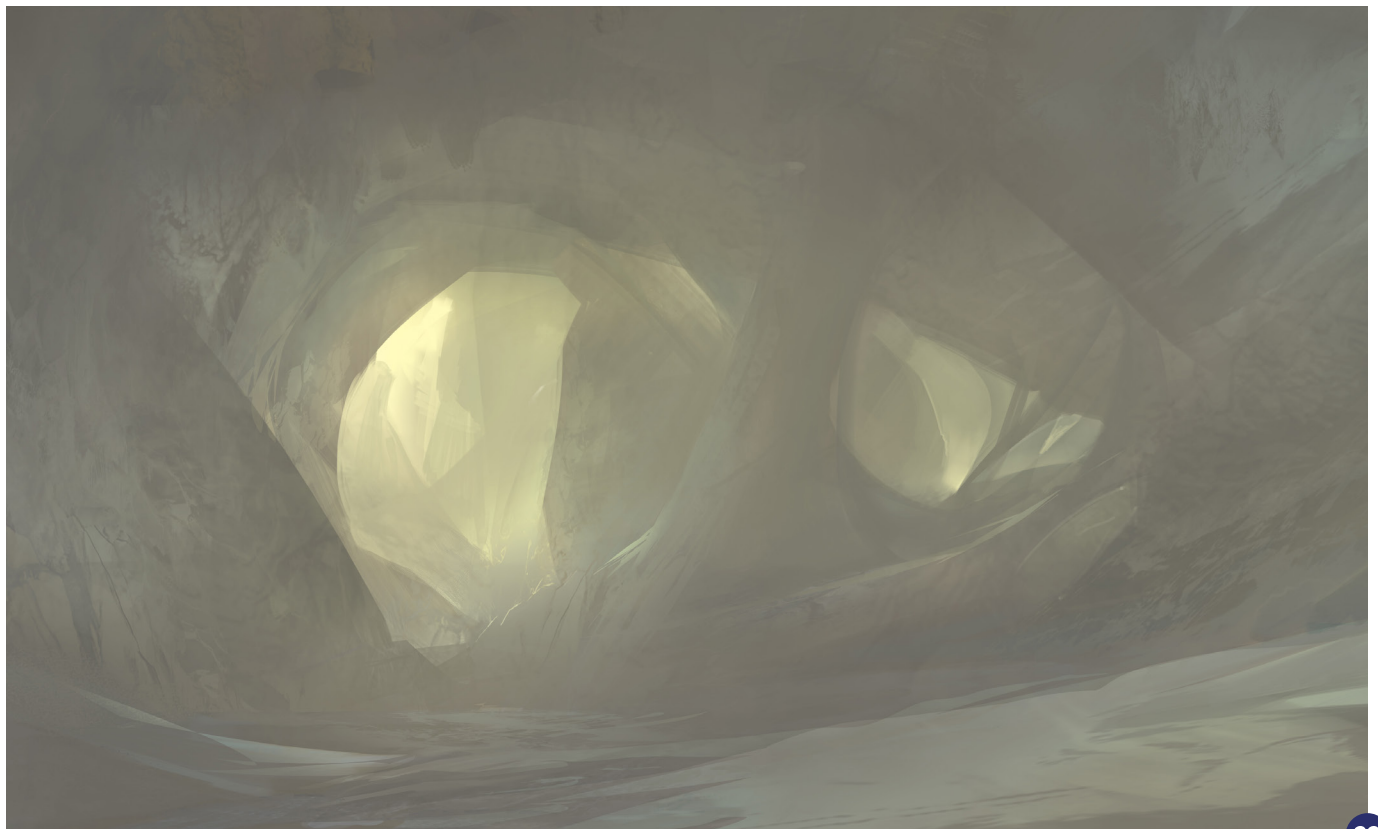
18 Again, flipping the image to check the designs work well

19 Adding eerie mist into the scene after checking its composition

20 Adjusting the fungus texture detail into the foreground

21 Pushing the lights and darks to create a greater contrast in areas of the image

22 Toning down the hues to a more appropriate level



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and composition, and the subject matter did not come about until much later. It was almost like building a stage for a play with no props or characters in the scene. Once the stage was constructed it was about placing subjects into the scene that would support and strengthen the composition. Keeping the composition fairly simple in the beginning gave me the ability to add complexity as the painting developed. It really depends on the painting, but sometimes I will paint the figure in during the block-out stage. As long as you're always considering composition, the order in which you paint is not something to which you critically need to stay rigidly attached.

24 Creating a vehicle: The last element I decide to add to the piece is a vehicle. I block out the vehicle in a solid flat tone to begin with. I will work with a big shape and erase and paint around it until I find something I like. I go through a few iterations of silhouettes before locking it down.

From there, I create a selection of the shape to confine my brush to. This allows me to focus on massing out the vehicle in values and color, without redesigning the overall shape.

Creating silhouettes is a really important element of painting and it's fairly easy to practice.

25 Integrating the vehicle: With an established silhouette, and after rendering shapes a bit tighter in the design, I hit the vehicle with an atmosphere, fog, and steam pass. This brings a bit of dynamism into the area, which before, was an inactive space, so to speak.



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26 Re-checking the characters: I decide to revisit the spacemen for a final pass and give them a quick quality check. I zoom into the image a bit to clean up some edges and iron out a few extra details.

With the characters a bit more fleshed out, I then do a quick pass of fog to soften some of the edge detail work I have just put in. At this point I am satisfied with the figures and feel comfortable leaving them as they are to the end.

27 Checking the whole scene: I can now check the whole scene and review from afar. Things I ask myself include: Are the characters legible? Is there a clear foreground, mid-ground, and background? Does the composition move my eye around as intended?

28 More detail: I think it's at a good point to round off and call complete; however, a few things bother me. The top half of the painting is all pretty evenly dark. To a degree, this is okay, but it needs some light information to help draw the eye back down into the scene.

As a quick solution to this, I decide to introduce some hanging cave spores to the upper right-hand part of this scene. Placing them in position above the dominant figure in the scene will encourage the eye to one of the key focal points of the composition.

29 Finishing touches: I finish off the painting with a Levels adjustment layer to maximize the range of darks and lights in the scene. I still want the painting to be dark and moody so I am conscious not to go too extreme on the lights. It's very easy to over-exaggerate these things when you're just moving a slider bar back and forth.

With the last adjustment layer set I consider the painting finished. Knowing when a painting is finished is a difficult idea in general. You kind of have to 'feel it in your bones' when you're done. With each sequential painting you create, you'll gain a more acute sense of this.

Along with digital painting, continue to work traditionally. Fill up those sketchbooks! Really, nothing beats paper and pencil when it comes to improving your skills.

I hope this tutorial gives some good insight into brush creation, layer selections, and painting modes that will help with future paintings you create. Keep practicing! ●



23 Applying the Soft Light layer to make the purple seem less aggressive

24 Adding the silhouette of a vehicle to the scene

25 Using the vehicle to add activity and dynamism to the scene

26 Checking the detail on the characters

27 Making changes after reviewing the painting from a distance

28 Redirecting the viewer's eye by adding new cave spores to the scene, and checking it works with other elements in the scene

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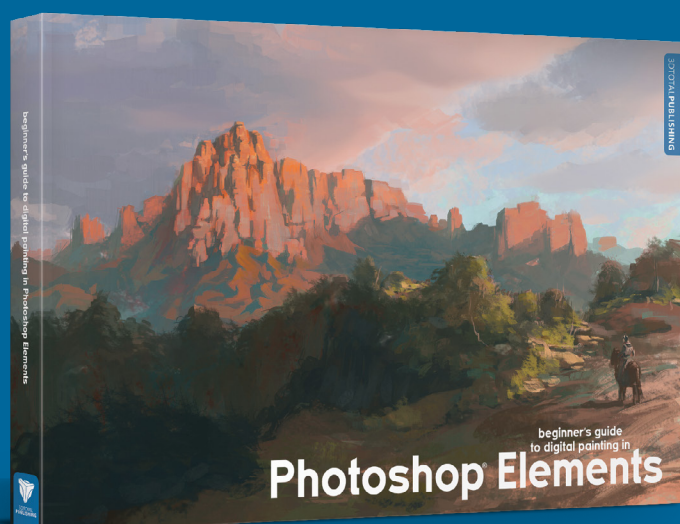


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